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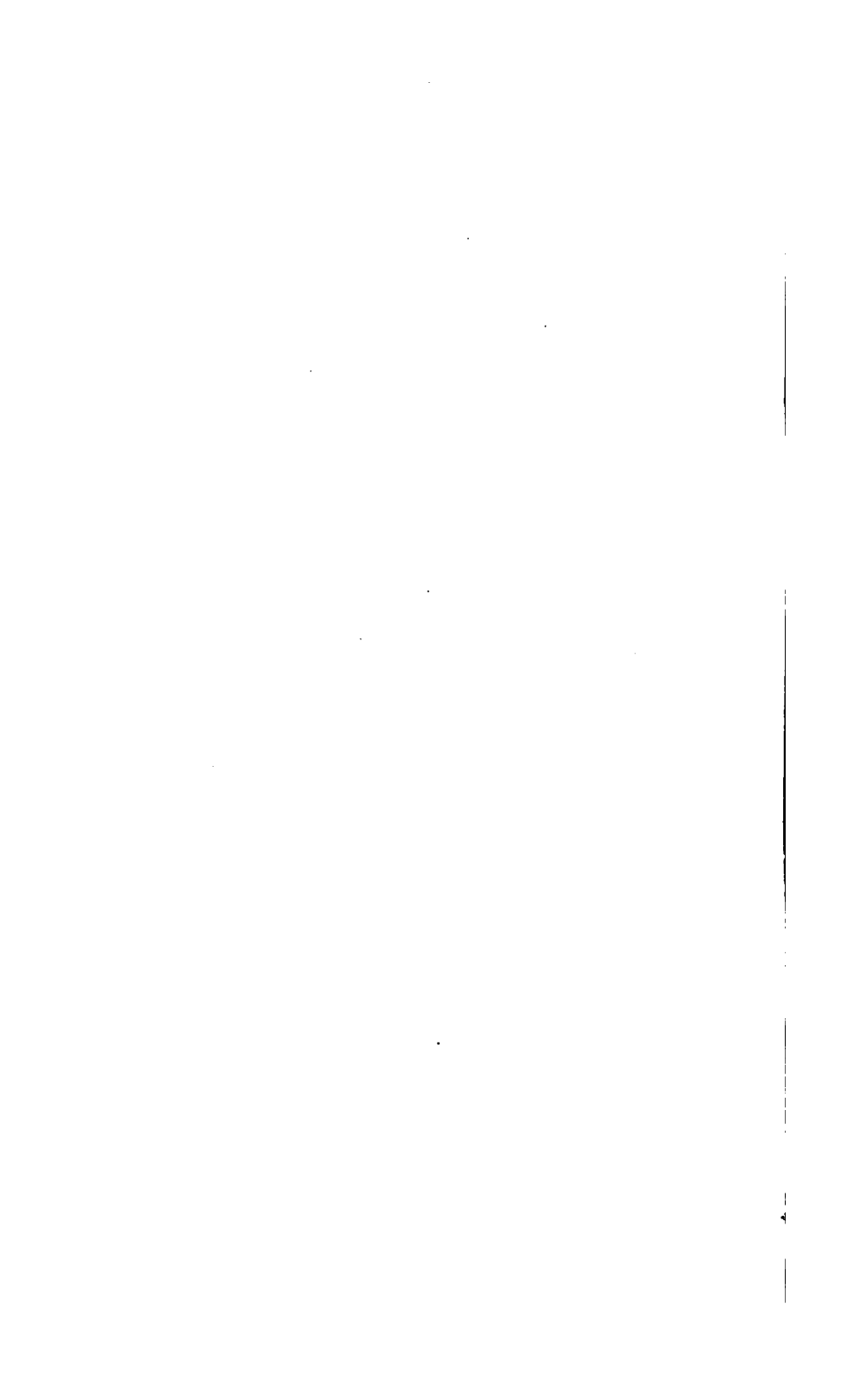
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ST. JOHN,

E.

THE EPISTLES
OF
ST. JAMES, ST. PETER, ST. JOHN,
AND
ST. JUDE.



THE EPISTLES
OF
ST. JAMES, ST. PETER, ST. JOHN, & ST. JUDE,
EXPLAINED
IN SIMPLE AND FAMILIAR LANGUAGE.

By G. B.

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GENERAL EPISTLE OF ST. JAMES.

CHAPTER I.

EXPLANATION.

VERSE 1 to 8.—The Epistle which we are now about to consider was written by the Apostle St. James, the son of Alpheus, who was the first Bishop of Jerusalem. This being his office in the Church, we may well suppose that he took an especial interest in all those Jews who became converts to Christianity; and this letter was written, in the first instance, for the benefit of those Jewish Christians who were dispersed over different parts of the world, and whom, for this reason, he could influence only by his writings. He begins with a kind of salutation, (1) I, James, the servant of God, and of Christ, wish you all health and prosperity. Then he proceeds, (2) My brethren, I would have you to count it only as a cause for rejoicing, when you find yourselves in circumstances of difficulty and temptation, (3) because the more your faith is tried, the more you will be

called upon to exercise the grace of patience ; (4) and it is well that patience should be exercised fully, in order that you may advance nearer and nearer to perfection. (5) And if any among you feels that he is in want of wisdom—which, especially in trying times, is so necessary—let him ask it of God, who is abundantly ready to give, and never reproaches any one for asking too much ; and he will obtain what he desires. (6) But, for this purpose, it is necessary that he should ask with an undoubting confidence in the power and willingness of God to answer prayer, and with a fixed desire to obtain his requests ; for he who prays with an undetermined purpose of mind is like a wave of the sea, which is tossed about with every passing wind. (7) Let not such an one expect anything from God. (8) A man of irresolute mind, who wishes to combine things of a totally different kind, can never be depended upon ; he is altogether unstable.

APPLICATION.

The blessedness of being really religious.

The command here given to us to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations, is one, which, without the especial grace of God, we cannot obey. It is contrary to human nature. But the Bible never tells us to do anything which is impossible. Therefore, since religion will teach us how we may count that to be joyful, which naturally we regard as

most painful, how happy a thing it must be to be truly religious !

Reader, is it what you are sincerely striving after? Do you feel that the great business of life is to bring your will into perfect submission to God's will? This is religion. Religion does not consist in going to church, in reading the Bible, or in the saying of prayers. No. These are only means which must be used in order that we may become religious; but they are not the thing itself. Religion consists in a change of heart; a heart naturally in rebellion against God, and hating His righteous law, must, by the Spirit's power and influence, become quite altered. And that man only can properly be called religious, who is striving to bring every thought and feeling into subjection to Christ; and such an one will feel thankful for the very trials and troubles, which other men would do nothing but grieve over. He will be thankful for them, because they exercise that faith and patience which God requires. It must doubtless be by painful discipline that a sinful man becomes perfect and entire, wanting nothing; but the end will fully repay the cost. And mark this: none are without trials; but it is the privilege of godliness alone to reap benefit from them. Every one sees that there is true wisdom in being able thus to turn the bitters of life to sweet; but how few possess it! Many will say, Oh, I envy those who have this wisdom; I wish I had it. But there they rest. Now, what says St. James, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given him." To ask and have, this seems easy work. But alas! there is a difficulty to be overcome: the

difficulty is for people to be really and truly and steadfastly in earnest, when they ask to be made wise unto salvation. If every one who, at any time in the whole course of his life, had asked for heavenly wisdom were to obtain it, we may well believe that few indeed would be lost. No doubt every one, when he thinks about it, wishes his soul to be saved. But in order to obtain our request, we must ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea. He who would be religious one day, and is all for the world the next, and has not made up his mind what it is that he really wishes for, must not think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. The first thing which is necessary, in order to make prayer of any use, is a hearty desire. We must really long to obtain the thing we ask for, and be willing to take some pains to get it, or prayer is a mockery of God. Many people, if they would stop to think over what they have said in their prayers, would find that they did not really wish God to take them at their word; they did not exactly mean what they had said. For instance, many who ask God to make them holy, have no wish or intention of giving up those evil habits, and bad practices, which they know to be entirely at variance with true holiness. This sort of trifling with God is very shocking; and yet how common it is. How many people there are who say, "From envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, good Lord deliver us," who yet harbour in their hearts malice and deadly hatred against some fellow-creature. We often hear people say, I never will be reconciled to that man; nothing can ever make me forget, and

forgive what he has done. And yet the person who thus speaks doubtless goes to church, and even dares to ask God to pardon his sins, only upon the condition of his forgiving every one their trespasses against him. Such is indeed a double-minded man ; and what can he expect ? certainly to obtain nothing by his prayers but a double weight of condemnation. But in order to make prayer available, there must be not only sincerity of desire, but also firm faith in the power and willingness of God to give.

We may observe how often our Saviour, when upon earth, said to those who asked a favour of Him, “ Be it unto you according to your faith.” And He says the same thing to us. He says : “ Ask in faith” ; “ Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it :” that is, expect great things from Me, and I will not disappoint you.

But many people ask, and never look for an answer ; they never expect that the thing will be unto them according to their prayers. And this is why they do not receive. But if we would trust God, and believe that He is indeed a God that answereth prayer, and has more pleasure in giving than we in receiving, how wonderfully might we prosper ; not, perhaps, in what the world would call prosperity, but in that sort of prosperity which makes all things work together for our good.

Religion is the true philosopher’s stone. Philosophers in former days vainly hoped to find a stone, by the touch of which every thing might be turned into gold. Now observe : the real child of God can, by prayer, turn every thing into that which is far more precious than gold. Silver and gold, thieves

may break through and steal; but the Christian's treasure is laid up in bags that wax not old, and where thieves do not break through and steal. Oh, reader, make up your mind to strive to be a real Christian, cost what it may; and earnestly ask of God to make you such; and ask it in faith, nothing doubting but that He will give you what you desire.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 9 to 12.—St. James had stated that troubles and trials being intended for our good, must, by Christians, be regarded as a subject for rejoicing. And now, further to comfort his brethren, who were suffering persecution on account of their new religion, he shows in what way they still were gainers by the change they had made. He says, (9) You, my brethren, who are poor, may rejoice in your religion, because, whatever you may suffer on account of it, it has exalted you into being children of God; it has actually raised your condition, by opening to your view hopes and expectations which you never had before. (10) And you who are rich, may be thankful that, whether your riches abide with you or not, you have been brought into such a humble lowly frame of mind, as makes you indifferent to these things. You have learnt to feel how little value they are of, seeing that we are all so soon to be cut down by death, and fade like a flower of the field. (11) For as soon as the sun becomes hot, it withers the herb, and the flower fades; so is it with the rich man; even in the common course of things, his

glory and honour soon pass away. (12) Therefore blessed is the man, whether rich or poor, whose faith and patience are exercised, and proved in the school of affliction. For after having passed through such trials well, he will receive that crown of life, which God has promised to bestow on them that love Him.

APPLICATION.

That by religion alone, we are enabled to overcome the love of the world.

It is a very common thing to hear people say a great deal about the vanity of all earthly things. One might fancy, from the way in which they talk about the unsatisfactory nature of wealth, power, and fame, that they thoroughly despised such perishable vanities. And yet a little experience soon proves, what a difference there often is between the way in which men talk, and that in which they act, in regard to these things. It is easy enough to acknowledge the folly of wishing to be rich and great, because we must all so soon lie down in the grave, and be the food of worms; but it is no easy matter to get the heart really free from the love of wealth and power. True it is, that we all do fade as a leaf; the next summer's sun may, or may not, shine for us; but we know that ere long it is sure to shine upon the turf that covers our cold remains. Now, knowing this, and seeing that as a flower of the grass we all so soon pass away, one might

suppose that during our short uncertain time of trial, the poor would diligently seek to be exalted, and the rich strive to secure something better than worldly wealth; one might suppose that sound common sense alone would lead men thus to act. But facts prove the contrary. Such wise reflections as these never, of themselves, made a poor man seek the true riches, nor a rich man rejoice when he was brought low. No; for this purpose we want a new nature, that can relish heavenly and spiritual things. Nothing less than the Spirit of God, by whose power we are born again, and made new creatures, can enable a man to put a true value on what are called the good things of this world. We may talk of their vanity; but without this we shall never thoroughly overcome the love of them. It is real religion which, in its transforming power, alters all our tastes and feelings, and by which alone a man can be enabled to say, like St. Paul, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ: yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." (Phil. iii. 7, 8.) When, by the grace of God, we have learned truly to value the salvation purchased for us by the precious death of Christ, we shall regard all earthly things in a new light, and shall feel then that poverty or riches are important only with reference to the use we make of them, each being intended by God to work for our good. Reader, are you fully aware, that it is real religion alone which can enable you to trample the world under your feet? Is it the first desire of your heart, and

the business of your life to become religious, and, by the power of the Holy Ghost, to live above the world? If so, you are well off, be your outward circumstances what they may. You have cause to triumph, even if in great affliction; for St. James says, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation;" and troubles are temptations; of that there is no doubt. Great bodily suffering is a temptation to fretfulness and impatience. The loss of friends, or their unkindness, is a temptation to rebel against God, who has permitted such painful events to arise. Great poverty is a temptation to use unlawful means for supplying our wants. Thus troubles are sure to be temptations in many ways; but whoever endures them well, is the better for them: for it is a proof of love to God, when any one so fears Him as effectually to resist sin, when strongly tempted to it.

Then, after our religion has for a time been severely put to the proof, and found sincere, the end will come, the happy and glorious end of all sin and sorrow! And then the crown of life! What may not these words imply? Something no doubt good and grand beyond the power of language to express. But, be it what it may, this is what God, who cannot lie, has promised to give to them that love Him, to them that have proved their love by a faithful endurance under strong temptation. Surely St. James was right in saying, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

EXPLANATION.

Verse 13 to 21.—St. James now warns his afflicted brethren against a very common error; he says, (13) Let no man think, when he is led into sin through the trying circumstances in which he finds himself placed, that it is God who tempts him to evil; for it is contrary to the nature of God either to do evil, or to lead others to it. (14) But in every case, the cause of temptation is in a man's own corrupt heart, which entices him to the indulgence of wrong desires. (15) In the first place, evil desires spring up in the heart, they lead to the commission of sin; and then, sin being finally accomplished, the fruit thereof is death. (16) Do not deceive yourselves, brethren, in this matter, (17) but know that God is the author of good, and not of evil. Every good and perfect thing comes from Him, as His gift, who is the Father of lights, and in Him there is no changeableness: no, in Him there is not the shadow of turning towards that which is evil. (18) Of His own free and condescending mercy, He has, through the Gospel, begotten us to Himself as sons, that, being the first to partake of the fruits of His mercy to mankind, we should be wholly dedicated to Him. (19) Therefore, my beloved brethren, seeing we are so favoured by God, let every one be anxious to obtain knowledge on religious subjects, but cautious how he speaks upon them; and, above all, let him be careful not to give way to anger, if what he says be not well taken; (20) for it is not by anger that the righteous-

ness in which God delights can be promoted. (21) In the first place, then, let every one be careful to put away all that is evil of every kind, and to receive with meekness that word of truth, which is able to save the soul, when properly engrafted into the heart and life.

APPLICATION.

To lay the blame of our conduct on our circumstances, is to charge God with our sin.

When the Almighty inquired of Adam if he had eaten of the fruit of the tree, of which he had been commanded not to eat, what was his answer? Did he humbly confess that he was guilty, and bewail his sin and folly? No. His answer was, "The woman whom *Thou* gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat;" which was as much as to say, the fault was your's, for giving me such a companion. The same sort of thing is, alas! still to be found among his sinful descendants. Many people in times of trouble seem to think that, since God has appointed the trial, He is to blame if they sink under it; or, at least, that it would be cruel in Him to punish them for the sins, which, owing to circumstances, they have fallen into. Oh, what a fearfully sinful state of heart does this betray. What dreadful rebellion against God, and His righteous government. That we should submit entirely to His laws, is what God has a just right to require of us; and though

obedience may be difficult, we are not on that account allowed to choose whether or not we will obey. To attempt in any way to find excuses for sin, does but increase our guilt, as it shows such a want of humility, and such an absence of all true penitence. To say, when we are tempted, I am tempted of God, is what few will dare to do openly ; but, though we may not be bold enough to accuse God in so many words of being the author of sin, yet it comes to the same thing, if we throw the blame upon those circumstances, of which He certainly is the author. Thus, for instance, some will say, It was owing to my great poverty that I was tempted to be dishonest : another, It was the unkindness of my parents that led me to be undutiful to them. Thus, as Adam said, "The woman whom Thou gavest me " caused me to sin ; so they say, The poverty which was appointed for me, or, The bad parents who were given me, caused me to sin. And can it be denied that this is throwing the blame upon God, who is the Great Governor of the World, without whom not a sparrow can fall to the ground, or one hair can be made black or white ? Reader, whenever you do wrong, and then complain of circumstances, instead of humbling yourself, and heartily repenting of your sin, you may be sure that you are accusing God in some way or other ; and if you would fully sift the matter to the bottom, you would find it to be so. And observe, while this state of mind lasts, it is impossible to suppose that God will forgive you. What wise parent would pardon a child, until humble enough to own itself in the wrong ! And can we then suppose that God will

forgive us, until we are willing to take the blame to ourselves, and to acknowledge that He is as incapable of tempting others to sin, as of being tempted Himself? Adam fell into sin through his own weakness, in yielding to the temptation offered to him; so in like manner, when we are drawn aside from the right path, it is not owing to the circumstances which cause our temptation, but to our own weakness in yielding to it. Our sin lies in this—that we might have resisted, but we did not. By the help of God we might have acted differently, and if we are not willing to own this now, with humiliation and true sorrow of heart, we shall be made to do so with shame and confusion of face at the great judgment-day. Then, what would we not give to get back to earth, and try again! But that cannot be. Now we are upon our trial. Now we may either give way to sin, or effectually fight against it. But if we give way, and fancy that, for some reason or other, we could not help it, we shall be forced to tell a different tale, when, alas, the acknowledgment will come too late.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 22 to 27.—St. James had said, that the Word of God was able to save the soul; but now, to prevent a very common mistake, he guards his disciples against supposing that the mere act of hearing or reading the Bible will be sufficient: he says, (22) Be careful that you not only study God's Word, but that you live according to its doctrines and precepts, else you will fatally deceive yourselves.

(23) Any one who hears the Word of God, but does not attend to it, so as to govern his conduct according to its laws, may be compared to a person looking at himself in a glass, (24) who, though he sees an image of himself, yet it makes so little impression that he turns away from it, and immediately forgets what he is like. (25) But a man who carefully studies the plan of gospel liberty, and continues steadfastly to hold the true doctrine, that man not being a careless hearer, but one who puts in practice what he hears, shall have the blessing of God with him in all he does. (26) Whoever amongst you makes a pretence to religion, and yet puts no restraint upon his tongue, but makes an improper use of it, deceives himself if he fancies his religion to be worth anything. (27) That religion alone is acceptable to God, which shows itself in works of charity, and a life of holiness, in being kind to the fatherless and the widow, and in keeping clear of all the sinful practices which abound in the world.

APPLICATION.

Unless we take the Bible for our guide, to read it is of no use.

A very little reflection must convince any one, that it is absurd to suppose that God will be pleased with us merely for reading a certain portion of His Holy Word, without any reference to the effect produced by it. And those who feel satisfied with themselves for having performed this task, as a matter of duty,

are not a bit wiser than the poor Roman Catholic, who hopes to please God by saying over a certain number of prayers in a language he does not understand. When we are about to read the Scriptures we should consider what it is that we are going to do. Are we going merely to amuse ourselves with reading, or are we going to study God's Word with the desire of knowing His will? If the latter, then we must remember, that if we would profit by the reading of the Bible, we must pray for the help of the Spirit, to enable us rightly to understand the Gospel. And be it observed, though the Gospel is here called the law of liberty, it affords no liberty to sin; quite the contrary. The liberty which the Gospel offers is a deliverance from Satan's power, thereby leaving us free to serve God. Again, if we would profit by the reading of the Bible, we must compare ourselves with what we there find written, and consider how far we are conformed to the mind and will of God, as regards our actions, our words, and our feelings. Whereas too many people read the Bible without any reflection, or self-application at all; and when they have closed the book, they are neither wiser nor better than if they had never opened it. Oh! let us not thus deceive ourselves with a formal sort of religion, profitable neither for this world, nor the next. But let us inquire in what way we are the better for having read God's Holy Word.

In the first place, have we learned to feel it a duty to put a bridle upon our tongue? There is no member of the body with which we are all so apt to sin as the tongue. How easily do we let fall from our lips words which ought not to be spoken. Now,

St. James does not say that every man's religion is vain who thus sins; because the very best sometimes speak improperly. But he does say, our religion is vain, if we do not bridle our tongue; that is, if we do not keep a watch over it, and strive at all times to speak in a proper manner. Some people seem to think they have a right to say just what they like. When they are angry, they give way to all kinds of abusive language; when they are merry, they fear not to make a joke of sin; and when they wish to amuse themselves, they care not whose feelings they wound, or whose character they injure. Vain, indeed, is all pretence to religion when this is the case.

In the second place, has our religion taught us to feel for the sorrows of others, and to be anxious and pains-taking to relieve them? We make a sad mistake, if we fancy we can please God, while we give ourselves no trouble to please our fellow-creatures. If we can be satisfied to leave the fatherless and the widows to suffer, without doing our best to make their sorrows lighter, we are thinking too much of ourselves, to be the real children of God. God will care for us, and give us all things needful, both for soul and body, if only we care to please Him; but a selfish creature can never please God. There is no pure religion in that heart which is not alive to the feelings of others, and willing, at much cost of toil and labour, to strive to make other people happy. Lastly, has religion taught us the necessity of great watchfulness, in order to live unspotted from the world? To do as others do, is the rule too commonly adopted; but if this be our law, it will be sure to lead us far enough from that pure and undefiled religion, which

alone is acceptable before God. The Scriptures tell us to come out from the world, and be separate; and again, that we must be a peculiar people, different from others, because zealous of good works. We must labour hard to purify ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Oh, reader, it is, indeed, no easy matter to be really and truly religious, but they only who are so, are safe and happy.

PRAYER.

Almighty and most merciful God, of Thy sovereign will Thou hast placed me in a state of trial; grant me grace to profit by all those many temptations and troubles which here abound. Enable me even to count it joy when afflictions arise, that I may thereby be weaned from the love of this world, and have an opportunity of exercising faith and patience towards Thee. Lord, grant that patience in me may have its perfect work, that I may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. O Lord, I thank Thee, that Thou hast been pleased to say, that if any man lack wisdom, he may ask it of Thee; and Thou wilt give it liberally, and not upbraid. Encouraged by this precious promise, I now draw nigh to implore that help which I so greatly need. Oh Lord, I am weak, sinful, and ignorant, but I beseech Thee to make me wise unto salvation; and help me to believe, that in seeking help from Thee I shall surely find it. Oh make me thoroughly in earnest

in my request. Grant that I may not be unstable either in doctrine or practice, like a wave of the sea tossed about by rough winds, but that I may persevere steadfastly unto the end in my Christian course. Grant, O Lord, that I may know and feel more and more the blessedness of true religion. Make me to understand how faith exalts the Christian of low degree, and teaches humility and meekness of spirit to those who have power and riches. Impress upon my heart the vanity of earthly things, that I may set no value on that which withereth as a flower of the field, but make me diligently to seek after true riches. Enable me so to pass through all the trials of this present world, that in due time I may receive that crown of life which Thou hast promised to them that love Thee. Oh Lord, if at any time I fall into sin, suffer me not to repine at the circumstances which may have led to it, but penitently to mourn over the evil which still dwells in my heart. But, notwithstanding my many sins, I desire to praise Thy name, O gracious God, for the blessed hope that Thou, of Thine own will, hast begotten me with the word of truth. From that word may I ever be ready to learn what Thou art pleased to teach, and make me slow to speak, slow to wrath. Above all things, preserve me from religious strife, since the wrath of man can never further the cause of true righteousness. I beseech Thee, help me to lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and to receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save my soul. Grant that I may not only be a hearer, but a doer of Thy word. Assist me, Lord, in keeping a watch

over my words, lest by an unbridled and unholy tongue I prove my religion vain. On the contrary, enable me to show forth my faith by my kindness and love, towards the fatherless and the widows, and by keeping myself unspotted from the world. Grant this, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

EXPLANATION.

VERSE 1 to 7.—In the close of the last chapter St. James states, that pure religion always makes people anxious to relieve and comfort the poor and the afflicted. But now he goes on to prove that fondness for riches and rank is wholly inconsistent with true religion. (1) My brethren, he says, you who profess the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, suffer not yourselves to show partiality in your behaviour, according to a person's rank and station; for instance, (2) when you are assembled either for public worship, or for the execution of justice, if one man comes in handsomely dressed, and another in poor raiment, (3) and you show all manner of respect to the former, and treat the other with contempt, (4) do you not show an undue partiality for the rich and the great of this world? You judge of persons not according to what they

really are in the sight of God, but according to the corrupt and evil feelings of your own hearts. (5) Observe now what I say, has it not pleased God in an especial manner to give to the poor of this world the blessing of faith in Christ? which is in fact true riches, because it makes them heirs of that glorious kingdom, which He has promised to give to them that love Him. (6) And notwithstanding this you are inclined to despise the poor. And yet is it not the rich who are your chief persecutors? Do they not continually bring you before the magistrates to be judged on account of your religion? (7) Is it not they who most frequently heap blasphemies on the name of Jesus Christ, which name you bear as a mark of your holy profession?

APPLICATION.

Faith more valuable than wealth.

It is one thing to pay that proper respect which is due to rank, and it is quite another thing to show any partiality towards those who possess it. We are instructed by God Himself to pay honour where honour is due; and every right mind will feel that it is due to those who are placed by Providence in situations above us. But to value people according to their wealth and dignity, proves an evil heart, ill-instructed as to the real nature of things. Let us ever be ready to pay to rank and station that sort of attention and deference which is proper, but let

us not set our hearts upon them. They are not worthy to be coveted after, and esteemed as things of value. They are at best short-lived vanities, and often prove temptations to evil, which, not being resisted, cause utter ruin. But, alas! there are many who would rather have wealth and honour in this world than possess a kingdom in the world to come. That this is true, no one can deny: and why is it so? Why do men prefer fading honors, to enduring glory, and would rather have pleasure for a short time than pleasure for evermore? The reason is the want of faith. They may call themselves Christians, but they have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Without denying the truth of Scripture, they are still unbelievers. When people are fully convinced of the truth of what the Bible tells us, they act accordingly. And so it is, that any one who is quite sure of being, very soon, perfectly happy in heaven, cares very little about the trifles of this world. The love of dress, and the love of riches, and the value for high sounding titles and honors, are things very natural in those who have nothing better to look forward to; but if we believe that the Lord of glory has purchased for us an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, we shall learn to disregard these things, and feel that an eager pursuit after them is nothing better than child's play. But now comes the practical question: Have we faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? And for fear of self-deception, let us put another question: Do we love Him? Because God has promised His kingdom to them, and them only, who love Him. It must be a great happiness to the poor to think that

in this matter poverty is no hindrance to them. Heaven is not to be purchased, and, therefore, they are quite as well off, in a religious point of view, as the rich. In fact, they are better off, because riches very often act as a heavy weight, to keep the soul in bondage to the world. Experience certainly proved this to be true in the early times of Christianity; for the Jews asked, when speaking of Christ, "Have any of the Rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on Him?" (John vii. 48.) They were fishermen and tradespeople generally who followed Christ, and from among them He chose His twelve apostles, to prove to us that certainly not wealth, nor station, nor even learning, is required in those who become heirs of Christ's kingdom. No; what we want is faith; the more faith we have the more we may be accounted rich. It is faith which makes the grand distinction between one man and another in God's sight, and this is open alike to all. It is God's gift, His best gift; and we have this promise, "Ask and it shall be given."

EXPLANATION.

Verse 8 to 13.—In order to avoid showing any partiality towards the rich, St. James says, (8) Observe the golden rule given to us by our Lord Himself, namely, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," then you will do well. (9) But if you show partiality you commit sin, and are in consequence under condemnation as a transgressor of God's law. (10) For he that wilfully breaks one

of God's commandments is as completely a condemned sinner as if he had been guilty of breaking every one. (11) Because the same divine authority which commands us not to commit adultery, says also, thou shalt not kill ; therefore, though we may abstain from adultery, yet if we commit murder, we are guilty of disobedience against the great Law-giver. (12) Let me, therefore, advise you always to speak and act, as persons who know, that though the Gospel law is liberty in one sense, it still will judge and condemn those who are wilfully disobedient. (13) He who has been wanting in mercy to others, will be judged and condemned without mercy, although God in the Gospel displays His goodness in rejoicing to show mercy, rather than to exercise severity in judgment.

APPLICATION.

That the smallest wilful sin is rebellion against God.

A very important lesson is here taught us, namely, this, that a wilful disregard of any one of God's laws, however trifling it may seem to us, excludes us from all benefit in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel proclaims mercy to the utmost, where there is sincere repentance, but no mercy at all towards such as make light of God's commands. The Gospel law may be called a law of liberty, because it constrains us by love rather than by fear, and because it requires sincerity and not perfection ; but still it gives

us no liberty whatever to commit the least sin. If we hope to profit by the offers of mercy in Christ, we must be determined to fight against, and, to the utmost of our power, to overcome sin in every shape. If we show favour to any wrong propensity, and find excuse for even the least sin, the whole benefit of Christ's death is lost to us. He came into the world not to give men a licence to sin, but to teach them to hate sin, and turn from it. Sin, be it remembered, is the transgression of the law—any law, great or small ; and until we have learned to hate sin, we shall look in vain for salvation to the Cross of Christ. This is little thought of by people when they say, I acknowledge that so and so is wrong, but still for certain reasons I must do it. What awful language! It seems wonderful how any one can dare thus to convict himself of wilful sin ; but he comforts himself with thinking, Oh, it is only a trifling thing. Still, if it is wrong, it is so because it is felt to be contrary to God's will ; and, by persisting in it, he shows a determination to have his own way, and to set God at defiance. This is rebellion. It is wilful disobedience ; and to resist the authority of God in one thing, will condemn us as completely as if we had rebelled against Him in every thing. It is not the greatness of sin, but the wilfulness of it which leads to condemnation. But let it be observed, that people are often guilty of wilful sin without being at all inclined to own it. In the great judgment-day, many will be obliged to own, that they did indulge themselves in some particular sin, who never would confess it before. When people are angry with those who point out their sins to them, as is often

the case, it shows that the fault is a favourite one which they choose to defend; there is evidently no sincere desire to root out all sin and evil. Of course it is painful to be reproved; but the real Christian who is decidedly at war with sin, and anxious to correct every thing that is wrong in his conduct and character, will always be thankful to have his faults pointed out, and, instead of excusing, will mourn over them. Reader, is it so with you? Are you really anxious to discern, and cast out every thing that is wrong in your conduct or feelings? or are you seeking to excuse, as a trifle, something which conscience tells you is not quite right? Examine yourself carefully, and remember, that "whosoever keepeth the whole law, and yet offendeth (wilfully) in one point, he is guilty of all."

EXPLANATION.

Verse 14 to 26.—St. James goes on to show the utter vanity of religious profession without a corresponding practice. (14) What, he says, is the use of a man talking about his faith, if his works do not prove it? Can such a faith as this save him? How little value there is in words without actions, may be seen by such a case as this. (15) Suppose a poor distressed creature, hungry and naked, applies to you for relief, (16) and you, with many fine speeches, bid the poor man be fed and clothed, and yet give him nothing to supply his wants, of what use are your kind words? (17) Just so faith, if not proved by works, is good for nothing. (18) Yes, a

man may well say to one who is making a vain profession, You tell me you have faith; I have works. Now, I say, prove to me, if you can, that you have faith without works, and I will prove to you that I have faith by my works. (19) You say that you believe there is one God. Well, this the devils also believe, and they prove that they do really believe it, for it makes them tremble. (20) But if anything more is necessary to prove to you, O vain man, that that is not true faith which does not show itself by works, (21) I will refer you to the case of our father Abraham. Was not his faith proved by works, when he showed himself willing, at God's command, to slay his son upon the altar? (22) Do you not see how faith acted upon him, to produce this obedience, and how this act of Abraham's proved the perfection of his faith? (23) Thus the Scripture was fulfilled, which says, Abraham believed God, and his faith was counted unto him for righteousness, and he was in consequence called the friend of God. (24) You see, then, in order for a man to be justified, he must produce good works to prove his faith, and not merely talk about it. (25) Again, did not Rahab the harlot show her faith by her works, when she welcomed, with kindness, the messengers who were sent to spy out Jericho, and helped them to escape with safety? (26) In fact, as a body without a soul in it is dead, so faith not proved by works is also dead.

APPLICATION.

How to discern true faith.

It may seem, at first sight, as if St. Paul and St. James did not agree on the subject of faith and works, since the one says, "By works a man is justified;" and the other says, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (Rom. iv. 5.) There is, however, no real disagreement between the two Apostles; but the whole of Gospel truth cannot be expressed in one verse. They are regarding the subject of faith in different points of view. St. James is speaking of that which is necessary to prove our faith to be true; whereas St. Paul is speaking only of true faith, and tells us how it is regarded by God.

The fact is, that we are not saved for the sake either of our faith, or our works, but simply and alone for the sake of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, faith is necessary, if we would apply to ourselves the benefits of His death; and good works are necessary, as proofs of this faith; so, though we are not saved either by faith or works, yet we cannot be saved without them. St. James, in the passage before us, endeavours to show the difference between what is real and what is false; but he does not deny the necessity of faith. How could he? It is obvious that no one can be saved by the Gospel, who does not believe it.

But the misfortune is, that so many fancy they have faith in the Gospel, when they have not. We often hear people talking a great deal about their faith, and how secure they feel of their soul's salvation; while their condition seems to others anything but safe, because religion is not bringing forth in them its proper fruits. Their faith is evidently worth no more than the charity of a man who talks about feeding the hungry, and clothing the naked, but never does it. He may flatter himself that he is very charitable, but he will not be so considered either by God or man. It is most awful to see people thus deceiving themselves, or trying to deceive others, when their business lies with God, whom none can deceive. Although some people are more anxious to be *thought* religious than to *be* religious; yet it is in truth a matter of very little consequence what men think of us; but it is of the utmost importance what God thinks of us. And in order to ascertain this, we should examine the reality of our faith; since a false profession, however bold, cannot save us. And St. James gives us the proper rule by which to judge ourselves. We must consider what fruit our religion bears. How is our faith proved by our conduct? Look at the case of Abraham; his belief in the wisdom and goodness of God was such, that he hesitated not to slay his own son at God's command. Rahab, too, showed how fully she believed that God could protect her, by protecting them who were sent to examine the city, which He was about to destroy. Have we anything to show which in like manner proves that we believe God's Word? Does our faith in unseen things enable us

to hold cheap those things which are seen and temporal? Is the love of this world overcome in us by the expectation of a better inheritance? It is vain, indeed, to talk of Christ as our Saviour, or of heaven as our home, if we do little or nothing to show our love towards Jesus Christ, or our desire to become fit for that world which we call our home. Such is the faith of thousands; but will such faith save? No! as the body without the soul is dead, so faith without works is dead also. Where there is a dead faith, there cannot be a living soul. Let us see to it, then, that our's is a living faith, which proves its existence by its powerful effects, daily and hourly seen in our life and conduct.

PRAYER.

O Lord God Almighty, Thou who dost mercifully hear and answer prayer, I beseech Thee, for Jesus Christ's sake, to instruct me how to fulfil Thy will, as regards the honour which is due from one fellow-creature to another. Take from me all that pride of heart which either seeks it, or refuses it, improperly. Give me riches or poverty, as it may seem best to Thee. But grant that, whether rich or poor, I may be rich in faith, and the heir, through Christ, of that heavenly kingdom, which thou hast promised to them that love Thee. Lord, grant that I may prove my love to Thee by loving my fellow-creatures, and endeavouring, in all things, to do to others as I would be done by. O Lord, I confess that I have broken Thy laws times without number. Make me to see my sins in their true light, and to feel that

I am indeed a miserable guilty creature, who can only be saved through faith in the atonement made for my sins by Jesus Christ. Give me, I beseech Thee, true and saving faith. Grant that it may not rest in words only, but may it be a life-giving principle, bringing forth in me the fruits of holiness, so that all who know me may know whose servant I am, and that, seeing my good works, they may glorify Thee, my Father, which art in heaven. Mercifully accept and answer these prayers; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER III.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 1 to 12.—In the first chapter of his Epistle, St. James had warned those to whom he wrote, against being too ready to teach; he feared that they might be tempted to give their opinion on sacred subjects, before they were themselves fully enlightened. The same advice is repeated here, (1) My brethren, beware how you assume the office of reprovers and teachers. Remember, that those who take upon themselves to find fault with others, expose themselves to a heavier condemnation in regard to any misconduct of their own. (2) And in many things we all do wrong. And so very difficult is it to avoid sinning when we begin to talk, that he

who can at all times guide his tongue aright, may in fact be called a perfect man, and may well be expected to have all the rest of his body in due subjection. (3) In order to show how important it is to have the tongue under proper control, we may observe, that as we manage powerful horses by means of a bridle, (4) and guide the largest ships in fierce storms merely by the helm, (5) so the tongue, though a very little member in comparison with the whole body, may boast of having great power either for good or evil. Observe: a spark of fire, trifling as it may appear, what immense mischief it may create. (6) So an unruly tongue is like fire, capable of the utmost amount of evil, and by it the whole body is influenced to commit sin. With a fire kindled in hell it excites the most burning passions, destructive of all peace. (7) Every sort of savage beast, bird, or reptile, has been tamed by human skill, (8) but the tongue of man cannot be tamed. (9) The tongue is capable of being used for the best of purposes, but too often it is employed for the worst. With it we praise our Heavenly Father; and with it too many vent curses on their fellow-men, made in God's image. (10) Thus, out of the same mouth too often are found to proceed both blessing and cursing; but this ought not to be. (11) Does any fountain send forth at the same time both sweet water and bitter? (12) Can the fig-tree bear olives, or the vine figs? Neither will one fountain yield at the same time salt water and fresh.

APPLICATION.

On the necessity of keeping a continual watch over our words.

When St. James says, "Be not many masters," it is not to be supposed that he wished to discourage those, who, seeking help and guidance from God, endeavour with true humility to instruct their fellow-creatures. The feeling that we are weak and sinful ourselves, is no just reason why we should shrink from warning a fellow-sinner of the danger he is in; and it surely will be numbered among our sins of omission, if, when opportunity offers, we neglect to show this proof of caring for the souls of others. But while, alas! too few consider that it is their duty to instruct the ignorant and warn the careless, far too many find their pleasure in blaming the conduct of other people. They take upon themselves to judge and condemn, with no other object than to gratify a disposition to find fault. It is to such as these that the Apostle here speaks a word of counsel; he would remind those who are so ready to make laws for others, and set themselves up as judges, where they have no business, that they have themselves to be judged by laws which they are continually breaking, and that their condemnation will be increased by this very readiness to condemn others. Our Lord says, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." A proper remembrance of our own sins would make us very tender in our thoughts and words respecting

the sins of others; not that our compassion ought ever to make us think lightly of sin; but we ought to remember, that God alone can tell to what degree each one is guilty, and therefore we ought to be more willing to hope, than ready to condemn. But unkind and harsh judgments are not the only things we have to watch against in the use of speech. Can anything be more true, than that the tongue is "a world of iniquity"? There is scarcely any sin to which a bad use of the tongue may not lead. It so stirs up evil passions, that we may easily see how truly the Apostle speaks, when he says, "This little member defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the whole course of nature:" that is to say, the whole course of events is influenced sometimes by a mere word. Whole nations have gone to war, and thousands of human beings have been hurried to their last account, for no other reason than because the passions of men have been stirred up to seek revenge for an idle word. Private families, too, are often made miserable for years by the uncontrolled use of language. The fact is, words are soon spoken, but oftentimes not soon pardoned, either by God or man, because of neither God nor man is pardon asked. When a slight apology would easily cause an error to be forgotten, the proud-hearted man too often refuses to say the simple words—I beg your pardon. Thus, he who will not own himself guilty of a careless word, thereby becomes guilty, in the sight of God, of great sin; sin which nothing but the blood of Christ can wash out. And where is the hope, that any one with so much pride will humble himself low enough to

approach the Cross of Christ in a truly broken and contrite spirit? There certainly must be a thorough change of heart before this can take place.

Reader, have you ever considered the great importance of watching your words, if you wish to form a right judgment of the state of your soul?

As we consider a fountain to be good or bad according to the water it sends forth, so we may judge of the state of the soul by the language which comes out of the mouth. People in general are very careless as to the style of their conversation, and many are continually using bad words, who have no idea that thereby their souls are in the greatest danger. They flatter themselves that it signifies little, because they mean no harm; and it may be they are ignorant of the harm they do, nevertheless it is certain that thereby great harm is done, both to themselves, and those that hear them. And besides this, language, as our Lord says, proves the state of the heart; for "a good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." (Mat. xii. 35). And St. James tells us that a tongue untamed is an unruly evil, set on fire of hell. This is a most awful expression, and must make one tremble for those thoughtless creatures, whose bad language too plainly tells us they are in the high road to destruction. One cannot but feel as though the flames of hell were already kindling around them. As we should be filled with horror at seeing a man riding a furious horse towards a precipice without a bridle, or tossed on a stormy ocean in a ship without a rudder, so we must feel terror for those

whose unbridled tongue is driving them straight on towards the fiery gulf of hell. Reader, if you are not fully aware of the importance of watching your words, be persuaded to consider well the portion of Scripture before you; and remember, that not only wicked words, or unkind words, must be watched against, but also foolish and idle trifling words; because it is written, "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." (Mat. xii. 36.) The power of speech was given to us, that we might have the happiness of communicating our ideas to one another, and that we might praise the Lord who gave it. But sin has so marred every thing, that this blessing is now the cause of the greatest evils; so that no man in his own strength can guide his tongue aright; even the most savage beasts can be more easily controlled. We must therefore make it the subject of our daily prayers to be enabled, by the grace of God, to restrain our tongues from evil, and to know how to use them properly, for the benefit of our fellow-creatures, and the glory of God.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 13 to 16.—In the opening of this chapter, St. James had alluded to those self-conceited persons who, fancying that they are very wise, take to themselves the office of judge, where they have no business; and now he says, (13) If there are among you any who are really wise, and have more knowledge than other people, let them prove their wisdom by the

superior excellence of their behaviour, and with great meekness let them show it forth in their whole conduct and conversation. (14) But if you give way to bitter envyings and harsh censurings of others, make no boast of such conduct; do not so belie the truth, as to pretend that this is the fruit of heavenly wisdom. (15) No; whatever may be your fancied superiority, it comes not from above, but is the offspring of a worldly, carnal, devilish nature; (16) for envying and quarrelling lead to all manner of evil.

APPLICATION.

How decidedly pride is opposed to true wisdom.

People, who take delight in finding fault with others, and in laying down the law, as if no one could possibly be right who did not agree with them, have, no doubt, a very high opinion of themselves; but it is a melancholy fact, that for this very reason no one else can, with justice, think highly of them; and their self-importance must fail them altogether, when they stand to be judged by God according to the rules of that religion, which they have so entirely mistaken. For what says our blessed Lord? "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." (Mat. xx. 27.) And again, "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven." (Mat. xviii. 3.) There is nothing so opposed to the whole spirit of religion as pride,

which seeks the glory of self; for religion teaches us to seek the glory of God, and the benefit and happiness of our fellow-creatures. And even in this life, the proud man must continually be meeting with mortifications, by finding that others will not acknowledge the superiority which he fancies to be in himself; and strife and contention are the necessary consequences. Whereas, not God only, but the world also, will in general acknowledge the wisdom of that man, whose good conversation is accompanied with great meekness. Those who seek not honour, find it; while those who seek it, and proudly demand it, do not obtain it. And especially will those fail of their object, who wish to influence others on religious subjects, while they maintain their own opinions with violence, and show feelings of bitterness towards those who differ from them. One thing is evident, that whether right or wrong as to their opinions, they have not received the truth into their hearts in the power thereof. And who can hope to teach what they have not learned? One of the most important things, then, for us to inquire into is, whether our religion dwells most in our heads, or our hearts. It is fearful to think that, while fancying ourselves very religious on account of our head knowledge, we may yet have a heart earthly, sensual, devilish. Let us consider, then, whether those who live with us, and know us best, could testify to our making our religion manifest by our good conversation; and whether they could, with truth, speak of us as showing forth the meekness of wisdom. Again, let us consider what our feelings are towards those who differ from us. Is there any

thing like bitterness, and strife, in our way of speaking or acting? If there is, let us remember, it would be lying against the truth, to suppose ourselves influenced by the wisdom which cometh from above, and which St. James so beautifully describes in the closing verses of this chapter.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 17 and 18.—Here St. James tells us that, in the first place, (17) heavenly wisdom is pure from the corruptions of our fleshly nature; and then further, that the effects produced by it are, a peaceable behaviour, gentleness of manner, a willingness to be influenced by the wishes of others, a heart full of mercy, and, in short, all other good fruits. It leads a man to act with the strictest justice, uninfluenced by the partialities of personal feeling, and, above all, it is perfectly sincere. (18) And the cause of righteousness is best promoted by the peaceable behaviour of those, who are thus under the influence of the religion of peace.

APPLICATION.

That we should examine ourselves, whether we are influenced by the wisdom which is from above.

Happiness is what we are all seeking after; but many do not know where it is to be found, and miss their aim in consequence. But surely we must all agree, that if heavenly wisdom, as it is here de-

scribed, were universally to prevail among us, this world would be a very much happier place than it is. And does not, therefore, reason tell us, that it must be our interest, as well as our duty, to cultivate this holy spirit and temper? Supposing we were to look no farther than this world, we should certainly be gainers by it. But this world is not all; no, nor the chief part of our existence. And as regards the world to come, we must remember, that only the pure in heart shall see God; that is to say, those only will live with God in heaven, who have on earth been purified by the wisdom which is from above; in other words, by real religion. And if not admitted into heaven, what then? Supposing we are not fit for the presence of God and His holy angels, there can be nothing else for us but to have our portion with the devil and damned spirits. This perhaps is an alternative not sufficiently thought upon; it is so dreadful, that most people turn their minds from it, and rest upon mere hope, a hope, the foundation of which they have never stopped to consider. But since it is most true that hell must be our portion, unless now we are blessed with the wisdom which is from above, let us seriously examine ourselves upon the subject, and see whether, according to the statement here given, we can be said to possess it. In the first place, heavenly wisdom is pure. This may seem almost to amount to perfection; but it should rather be considered as implying a hatred of all evil. No one can certainly be called pure, who feels pleasure in sin; we must therefore inquire whether the Holy Spirit has worked that change in us, by which we are led heartily to desire, and sincerely to strive

after a deliverance from every thing which is contrary to the mind and will of God. And then, looking further into particulars, let us inquire whether we endeavour to live peaceably with all men. Perhaps this may be very difficult; we may be surrounded with those who hold what we consider very wrong opinions, with whom differences must arise. Or we have very bad tempers to deal with; but then, the question is, Are we gentle? Will those who are impartial judges say that we labour for peace? that we avoid disputes as much as possible, and by great gentleness turn away wrath? Alas, how often is anger kindled or increased by aggravating words and contemptuous looks; and oh, how very contrary is this from heavenly wisdom! Observe, the wisdom which is from above will make us tender of the feelings of other people. The great object of the Holy Spirit's teaching, is to destroy in us that selfishness which is so natural to our corrupt nature, and which shows itself in various ways. By nature we all feel an undue partiality towards ourselves; we each think our own opinions, and our own ways of proceeding far superior to other people's; and if any one should say, I am free from this partiality, it would probably only prove how very much he was blinded by his self-love. It ought, therefore, to be a matter of inquiry, whether the wisdom which is from above has put us on our guard against this evil, making us aware that there is a danger of our judging harshly of others, merely because they differ in opinion from ourselves. Finally, let us beware of hypocrisy. Many there are who, from mere worldly motives, practise that peaceableness and gentleness which are

here described as the fruits of the Spirit. Politeness and good manners will go a great way in leading men to imitate the excellencies taught us in the Gospel. It may even serve their turn to put on so far the appearance of real godliness, as to deceive those around them. As far as the present world is concerned, all this may be very profitable; but what will it avail at the last great day; for we cannot deceive God by mere outward appearance. Let us, therefore, be more careful to inquire whether we are seeking to stand well in the eyes of men, or whether we are really studying in all our ways to please God, who looks not at the outward appearance, but at the heart. If thus we are really living in the exercise of heavenly wisdom, we are sowing seed which shall spring up, and bear the fruits of righteousness. And the fruits of righteousness are, in this world, peace; and, in the world to come, life everlasting.

PRAYER.

O Lord God, I beseech Thee to preserve me from falling into the sin of judging of others, as though I were their master. Create in me a tender compassion towards all who have wandered from the right way, knowing that I also am continually offending in many things; especially, O Lord, I confess and lament that I so often sin with my tongue. Help me, I beseech Thee, by Thy grace, to keep a watch over the thoughts of my heart, and the door of my lips, that no evil communication may proceed out of my mouth. Of myself I cannot order my conversa-

tion aright; I am constantly tempted to say things I ought not, and this unruly evil I am utterly unable to resist. But I humbly look to Thee, O Lord, mercifully to grant me the help I need, in order to use the blessing of speech for the end for which it was given, especially that I may therewith heartily praise Thee, the Giver of all good things. Cleanse, I beseech Thee, the fountain of my heart, that no bitter envyings or strife may dwell there; but grant that I may be endued with heavenly knowledge, and show it forth by peculiar meekness. I pray earnestly for that wisdom which is from above, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated. O Lord, grant that I may indeed bring forth all the fruits of righteousness, which only grow in the hearts of those who labour for peace. Lord, I do truly desire to be at peace with all men, and that in my own soul may dwell evermore that peace which Thou alone canst give. I ask all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, be glory and honour for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER IV.

EXPLANATION.

VERSE 1 to 4.—In the last chapter St. James had shown, that the effect of real religion is to procure peace; and now he wishes to convince those to

whom he writes of their want of religion, from the absence of that peace, which is the fruit of righteousness, and inseparably connected with the wisdom which is from above. He reminds them of the perpetual contests going on among them, and then asks, (1) From whence do you suppose these continual struggles arise, but from the sinful lusts which reign within you? (2) You give way to inordinate desires, and, in order to gratify them, will even dare to shed blood, but still you are not satisfied; you labour very hard, but all your striving and struggling are in vain, because you do not ask help of God; (3) or if you do pray to Him, He does not grant your requests, because you ask in a wrong spirit; He knows that your only object is the gratification of unlawful desires. (4) Do you not know—you who have acted like adulterers and adulteresses, in that you have forsaken God, whom it was your bounden duty supremely to love—do you not know, that the principles and practices of the world are so directly opposed to God's will, that you cannot love the world without being an enemy to God? Therefore, whoever is in friendship with the world, must be the enemy of God.

APPLICATION.

That not to love God is both sin and misery.

How many, alas, in these days might be convinced of their sad want of true religion, if they would endeavour to answer this question: "From whence

come wars and fightings amongst you?" Are not wars and fightings common things amongst us? A war of words certainly, if not of swords, and sometimes both. And whence do they come? They are surely not the fruit, which Christ's religion is intended to bear. If we should inquire why it is, that instead of peace and love reigning in our families, we find so much of fighting and quarrelling, St. James will tell us the true reason. It arises from our not having resisted those sinful lusts and passions which, in the school of Christ only, we learn how to subdue. It is the love of the world, and the love of self, which are opposed to our peace and true happiness; and this is what nothing can conquer but the love of God, which is, in other words, true religion. To be without this love of God is at once our sin and our misery.

The passage of Scripture before us shows most forcibly, how great the sin is of loving the world more than God. It is, indeed, far far greater than people in general have any idea of. There are few persons who would not shudder if charged with the sin of adultery; and yet, observe, little as the lovers of the world may think of it, such is their sin in the sight of God. They have given to another that love which ought to have been given to God. So much is it our duty to love God above every thing, that we cannot let our hearts go after the vanities and follies that surround us without incurring the greatest guilt. But though fightings and wars are mentioned as being some of the natural fruits which spring from a heart that loves not God, we must not suppose that all is right, merely because we may happen

to be of a quiet and peaceable disposition. There may be in us nothing worse than great thoughtlessness; and yet this, of itself, is great sin. It is very possible that, from want of serious consideration, many who are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, think themselves very good kind of people, and feel pretty sure that they are travelling on towards heaven. How it would surprise a person of this description to hear it said, you are no better than an adulterer; you have no real love to God, since you are careless about pleasing Him; and, therefore, He reckons you as His positive enemy. Now, since it is certainly true, that a very great many persons are in this most awful state of enmity against God, without knowing it, how important it must be for every one who reads this portion of Scripture, to stop and ask himself this solemn question, Do I rank among God's enemies? Am I a friend of this world? Such questions it may, perhaps, be difficult to know how to answer. But let us ask ourselves another question, Do I make it the chief business of my life to know how I may please God? There are many who would be exceedingly slow to acknowledge themselves His enemies, who cannot possibly flatter themselves that they are His true and devoted servants. But it is clear, that if we are not earnestly seeking to please God, we are seeking to please ourselves in our intercourse with the world; and this He will not fail to consider as enmity against Himself.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 5 to 10.—St. James had said that the wars and fightings going on among professing Christians were a proof, that their natural corruptions were still unsubdued; now, as he supposes those whom he addressed might be inclined to dispute this, he says, (5) Do you think that on this point Scripture speaks falsely, or that the Holy Spirit, while dwelling in us, can be the author of envious desires? (6) No, truly; the Spirit of God gives grace sufficient to overcome such evil tempers. So it is said in the book of Proverbs, that God sets Himself against the proud man, but gives His gracious assistance to the humble in mind. (7) Submit yourselves, therefore, to God, and put your trust in Him for help. Fight against the devil, and he will leave you; (8) approach God in humble prayer, and He will mercifully hear you. Give up all your sinful courses, and seek to purify your minds from that double-dealing, which hopes to serve God and the world at the same time. (9) Let the remembrance of the past fill you with grief and shame. Let your foolish gaiety be turned into deep sorrow for having so neglected God, and let your vain delights give place to the feelings of heavy distress. (10) Thus, if you humble yourselves before God, He will in the end lift you up.

APPLICATION.

That to follow after the ways of godliness is true wisdom.

It is the observation of the wise king Solomon, that "as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool," (Eccles. vii. 6) a bright blaze for a moment, and then all is over. Such is the merriment of those, who have no solid foundation of happiness; it may be loud and noisy, but it is hollow and heartless. Not unfrequently noisy mirth and a loud laugh are but the show of happiness, put on to hide a heart ill at ease. But even if, for a time, there be a real enjoyment in the thoughtless indulgence of all our low and selfish inclinations, still the end must come. Sooner or later, for better or for worse, this laughter must be turned to mourning, and this joy to heaviness. It must either turn to godly sorrow in this world, or to everlasting grief, despair, and torment in the world to come. Then how wise is the advice here given to all who hitherto have too much loved the world, and their own ease and pleasure. If, Reader, you are such an one, lay to heart the words of St. James, for most assuredly you have greatly mistaken your own interest in forsaking God. Though Christ invites His followers to a life of self-denial, while the devil says, eat, drink, and be merry, a very little experience will soon show whose service is the best. By the call of the Gospel we are required to deny only what

is corrupt and evil in our nature, and what, if indulged in, must undoubtedly end in misery; while at the same time every effort to root it out, though painful at the time, brings its reward; it causes a feeling of inward satisfaction, from the consciousness that this is the only way to obtain lasting happiness. Oh, then, let us listen to, and obey the voice of the Apostle, who bids us submit to God, and resist the devil. Doubtless to do this is no easy matter, because we are all by nature so proud. But what folly to fight against God. Since we must submit at last, why not at first; when by so doing we may obtain His help and favour. If we will but humble ourselves for our sins, and confess, with brokenness of heart, our past transgressions, God will look favourably upon us, for "He giveth grace to the humble." And we shall find that our temptations, though they may be very difficult to resist, will become less and less so if we constantly refuse to yield. Temptations are from the devil; but he will retire from the conflict when he finds that we are resolutely fighting against him, in the strength of the Lord. Alone, we are no match for Satan; but if we are truly humbled and penitent, we are not alone, for then God is with us. Hear what He Himself says—"the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy"—He says, "I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." (Is. lvii. 15.) The question, then, to ask is this, Can I hope that God sees in me a contrite and humble spirit? Does He know that I am afflicted

and mourn for my past neglect of Him, that my vain laughter is turned to mourning, and my sinful joy to heaviness? Am I careful to cleanse my hands from all manner of sin? Am I sincerely longing to purify my heart from all its corruptions? If thus humbled in the sight of God, we stand in a strength which is not our own; and, however powerful our enemies may be, we shall gradually be lifted up far above their power, for God will bruise them under our feet shortly; and we shall finally be made more than conquerors, through Christ that loved us.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 11 and 12.—St. James had pointed out quarrelling as a sin most inconsistent with a christian profession; and now he makes some remarks on the subject of evil speaking, a practice which especially tends to disturb the peace and love that ought to reign among us. He says, (11) Brethren, beware of harshly judging one another. He who thinks he has a right to judge, and condemn his fellow-creatures, takes upon himself to condemn that law of God, which forbids all such harsh judgment. Whoever thus sets up himself to judge of the propriety of God's law, no longer acknowledges that it is his duty to be obedient to it; but places himself in the position of a judge of that very law, which ought to be the rule of his actions. (12) Now, be it remembered, there is only one Being who has power to give laws to the world, and to judge the world, and His is a power not to be trifled with; for He can

save, or He can destroy, just as He pleases. Think, then, how little it becomes us to judge one another.

APPLICATION.

If we are not willing to obey God's laws, we in fact condemn them.

It seems an awful thing for man to be so bold as to sit in judgment on the laws of his Maker, and condemn them. But this is what, in point of fact, many do; and yet, perhaps from want of due consideration, they are not aware of what they are doing. If God has forbidden us to judge our neighbour, and yet we maintain our right to do so, and if the law of love which the Gospel proclaims is considered extravagant, and such as cannot even be aimed at, are we not making ourselves the judge of what God ought to require of us? And that such is the case with many, no one can deny. When people quarrel, how hard it often is to convince them that they ought to forgive each other. They will maintain their right to be angry; and if reminded that we are commanded to love our enemies, and to bless them that curse us, they will sometimes fairly say, that such doctrine is too high for them, they cannot pretend to be guided by it. Any one who thus speaks is most certainly not a doer of the law, but a judge; and alas, how completely has he forgotten the One only Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy! In like manner, if when we speak evil of our neighbour, we maintain that we have a right to say what we

think, are we not defying the Almighty, who has forbidden evil-speaking? Observe, we are not required to be blind to the failings of our fellow-creatures; on the contrary, it is set before us as a duty, so far to judge the character of others, that we may know how to behave ourselves towards them. We are told not to cast our pearls before swine (Mat. vii. 6); and not to keep company with such as are likely to lead us wrong, (Rom. xvi. 17); so that unless we form some judgment of the character of others, we cannot wisely and properly guide our own conduct. But this is a very different thing from unnecessarily speaking evil of others, and perhaps even taking pleasure in so doing, and judging and condemning where we have no business to give any opinion at all; and if we are really desirous of obeying the law, instead of setting up to judge it, we may easily understand our duty in regard to our fellow-creatures, by considering the golden rule, "whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." Mat. vii. 12.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 13 to 17.—St. James here points out the sin of living in a careless presumptuous manner, without reference to God. (13) Observe now, he says, how common it is to hear people say, I will do this or that to-day or to-morrow; I will go here or there, and make money and prosper. (14) Quite forgetting that no one knows what a day, nor even an hour, may bring forth; for what is our life to be compared to, but to clouds or steam, which is seen only for a

very little while, and then mixes with the air around, and is lost? So we appear upon this earth only for a very short time, and then pass away, and are seen no more. (15) Surely then we ought to say, If it be God's will, we will do so and so. (16) But on the contrary, you take pleasure in being as boastful and proud as possible. And let me tell you, in all such boasting there is great sin. (17) Now having said thus much, let me observe, that the knowledge of our duty, if we do not act according to it, adds to our guilt.

APPLICATION.

The happiness of believing that God's providence ruleth over all things, great and small.

We all readily acknowledge that there is a great and powerful Being who made us, and the world in which we live; and we are told that without His permission a bird does not fall to the ground. And yet how very common it is to find men speaking and acting as if everything were under their own control, and without making the slightest reference to the will of the Almighty; just, in fact, as if there were no God. And can we suppose that this sort of independence is what He will endure? Is it likely that the Maker and the Ruler of the world may thus, as it were, be put aside, and no wrath arise, no vengeance fall upon the men, who thus set at nought their Creator? The slightest reflection may convince us this cannot be. Let us then examine ourselves and see whether there be in us that mixture of neg-

ligence and pride, which causes mankind to live as if there were no God. We must have an anxious concern for our own real good, and a sincere wish to glorify God, before we can live in that depending, trusting state of mind, which alone is pleasing to Him. It is not enough merely to *say*, "If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that;" such words may easily slip over the tongue, as a matter of form, without meaning; but words alone will not satisfy God. He looks at the heart. Are we then deeply impressed with a feeling of the shortness and uncertainty of our lives, and that they are altogether in God's hands, so that we can form no plan for the future without remembering this, and referring all to His will? Moreover, is it a pleasure thus to depend upon God? or would we rather throw off the yoke, and be our own masters? Those who know anything of true religion, feel it their greatest happiness to cast all their care upon God; and those who have faith enough entirely to do this, are kept in perfect peace, because their minds are stayed on Him. Nothing but experience can prove how happy a thing it is to refer all our concerns to God; and this we are permitted to do even in things the most trifling. We are told that the hairs of our head are all numbered, which of course implies, that not only God knows how many hairs we each have upon our heads, but also that to each is allotted the right number. Now, though this is what no one will deny, it is a truth, which, in its practical consequences, is not sufficiently brought home; no, not perhaps to the feelings of any of us; for we are all too apt to think our trifling vexations beneath the notice of Almighty

God. Hence it arises, that sometimes while heavy afflictions are borne with the most christian patience, we see the very same person fretting exceedingly under the merest trifles; such, for instance, as the annoyance of growing grey, or becoming bald. But this would not have been the case, if the sufferer had equally referred his small as well as his great trials to the will of God. He would surely have found comfort, and taken his trouble more patiently, had he said to himself, The hairs of my head are all numbered by God, and without Him not one can be made black or white; therefore since it is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good. Some may perhaps be inclined to say, this is giving too much importance to trifles; but observe, whatever is enough to fret the mind, is really no trifle, though it may seem such to others. And there is neither wisdom, nor piety, in vainly trying to bear our small troubles in our own strength, instead of honouring God by submitting patiently to them, because they are the appointment of His own wise and tender love. And now let us seriously consider the concluding words of this chapter: "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Every opportunity which God affords us of being instructed in His will, must add to the weight of our condemnation, if we are not the better for it. How careful then we ought to be, that the instruction we receive tells upon our daily conduct. What we hear, and what we read, is either helping us forward, as it is intended to do, on our way to heaven; or it is adding a burden to our souls, which will weigh us deeper down into hell.

PRAYER.

O most merciful and gracious God, I beseech Thee to deliver me from the power of those hateful lusts, which war in my members. Knowing that the friendship of the world is enmity with Thee, I earnestly desire, and pray, that I may not be a friend of the world. Assist me rightly to perceive and know, wherein the ways and practices of the world are displeasing in Thy sight, and give me courage and constancy to resist them. Thou, O Lord, who resistest the proud, and hast graciously promised to give grace unto the humble, grant me an humble spirit, willing at all times to submit myself to Thy will and pleasure. Help me to resist the devil. Help me to draw nigh to Thee. Teach me how I may effectually cleanse my hands from all sin, and purify my heart from all double-mindedness. Grant that I may be deeply afflicted on reviewing my past sins, and be filled with mourning at every remembrance of any unholy joy. Preserve me, O Lord, from speaking evil of any one. Assist me by Thy grace more and more to walk according to the perfect law of love. Impress deeply on my mind the shortness and uncertainty of life, and all things in it. And since I know not what shall be on the morrow, help me every day so to live, as I shall wish I had done, when I come to die. In all my plans and arrangements for a future day may I ever refer to Thee, as the only disposer of all events. O Lord, grant that the more clearly I perceive and know my duty, the more careful I may be always to perform it. Gra-

ciously hear these prayers, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

CHAPTER V.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 1 to 6.—This chapter begins with an awful lesson to wealthy people, who misuse the power which riches give. It is probable that the threatening language which St. James uses has reference to the dreadful judgment, which God brought upon the Jewish nation by the Roman army, when Jerusalem was reduced to a heap of ruins. And it may be, therefore, as a prophet foretelling an approaching storm of wrath from God, that he thus writes: (1) Now then it is time for you, ungodly rich men, to weep and bewail the misery that is about to come upon you. (2) You will find that your wealth and your fine clothes are all worthless. (3) Your gold and silver, having been hoarded up, instead of being well employed, will witness against you, and fill you with remorse and vain regret, which will consume you like an inward fire. You have, indeed, heaped up for yourselves a load, with which you will at last be overwhelmed. (4) Your labourer's wages, which have been unjustly kept back, cry for vengeance, and the cry has reached the ears of Him, who ruleth as Lord over all. (5) You have spent your time on

earth in thinking of nothing but pleasure, and indulged in all manner of sin, as if this life were only like a day of feasting. (6) You have condemned, and put to death the innocent, who made no resistance.

APPLICATION.

That riches are to be feared rather than desired.

The folly, as well as sin, of misusing riches does not always appear plain in this world. Rich garments are not always moth-eaten, nor does gold and silver always canker; but ill-gotten gain and misimproved wealth are sure to be treasure heaped together for the condemnation of its possessor in the last great day, the day when God's wrath will burn like fire against all who have "lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton." The more we possess of riches and power, the more we shall have to answer for in that awful day. But while the warning voice of the Apostle is directed chiefly to the wealthy, it applies to all who so mistake the end for which they were sent into this world, as to make it their chief object to prosper here below. The love of money, and the love of pleasure, may exist, and does exist very often, when there is but little opportunity for gratifying these sad passions. Still the sin is the same. It is the covetous man whom God abhors, whether he abounds in wealth, or whether he does not, and to him the language of the text applies: "Go to now, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you."

Let not, then, the poor man comfort himself with saying, "There is no danger for me. I shall never have wealth to canker; no fear that I shall ever be able to live in pleasure upon the earth." There is no safety in all this, unless, indeed, the poor man can add, as a really wise one would add, "And I am heartily thankful to be thus, by circumstances, sheltered from such danger." If we would know whether or not misery is coming upon us in the last day, let us consider in what light we now regard the possession of wealth. Do we covet it as the means of obtaining more ease, more indulgence, finer garments, and more to gratify the feelings of vanity? or, on the contrary, are we afraid of these things as the allurements, with which Satan tempts souls to hell? Even if we fancy, that the desire of greater usefulness leads us to wish for more of the power which riches give, we probably greatly deceive ourselves; for the chances are, that the power, if given, would be used more for our own injury than for the good of others. Surely such a passage of Scripture as the one before us should lead us to *fear* rather than *desire* riches; and still more those words of our Lord, when He says, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." Can we really love God, and justly value the blessedness of heaven, if after being thus warned, we still love money, and long for it, and labour for it, without any anxiety about the consequences? Surely those have never rightly read the Scriptures, who see nothing in money but what is most desirable, and count him the lucky man who has plenty of it. Let us all remember this, that to live in pleasure on the earth is not what we ought to

seek after; and that if we do make it our object, instead of living to God, and striving to work out our salvation in a better world, our end will be misery; and after a few short years of more or less enjoyment, there will be nothing but weeping and howling for ever and ever.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 7 to 12.—St. James now turns to the afflicted Christians, and says, (7) My brethren, be patient under your sufferings, until the Lord Jesus Christ shall appear to take vengeance on your enemies, and to bring relief to you. For an example in patience, look at the husbandman; he does not expect to sow and reap all at once, but he waits with patience until the rains of autumn and spring have had their due effect in bringing the precious fruits of the earth to perfection. (8) In like manner, do you be patient, trusting with full assurance that shortly the Lord will appear in your behalf. (9) Beware of envy, and do not murmur and fret against each other, lest you also should be condemned, when the Judge, who is so soon to appear, shall take a just account of all. (10) As examples of patience under suffering, consider well the conduct of those prophets, who in former days were employed by God to make known His will to man. (11) We certainly consider those to be greatly blessed, who are enabled to be patient under much affliction, of which we have a memorable instance in the case of Job. And there we see the end, which the Lord had in view, in

afflicting him; and also we see how very pitiful, and full of tender mercy, the Lord is, notwithstanding that He permits His people to be afflicted. (12) Above all things, my brethren, beware lest your provocations should at any time lead you to swear; never use an oath at all of any kind, and be satisfied simply to answer the truth, whether it be yes or no; if you go beyond this, there is fear of your saying what you ought not.

APPLICATION.

That we are always the better or the worse for our troubles.

Whenever the Lord is pleased to bring us into trouble, we ought always to consider, that we shall certainly get either much good or much harm by it. God intends our good; but the devil has great hopes that he shall turn it to his account, and do us much mischief. Therefore we must needs be doubly on our guard; at all times we must watch, but particularly in times of trouble. St. James, in his address to his afflicted fellow-christians, evidently hopes, that they will imitate those prophets of the Lord, who had set them an excellent example how to suffer affliction with patience. If they did so, he knew, that like the early and the latter rain which nourish seed sown in the earth, their sorrows and sufferings would be the means, under God, of ripening their souls for the harvest of joy, prepared for them in heaven. But still, while he hoped this, he had his fears; and therefore he warned them of their danger.

He knew that in trying times a spirit of discontent is very apt to take possession of the mind. Why am I so afflicted, when others are allowed to prosper? is a sort of grumbling not at all uncommon. Therefore St. James says, "Grudge not one against another." If others are better off than ourselves, we ought to rejoice for them, instead of feeling envy and ill-will. Again, he says, "Above all things, my brethren, swear not;" beware of that irritation and violence of feeling, which persecution and hardship are so apt to call forth, and which expresses itself in bad words. If when our trouble arises from the unkindness of our fellow-creatures, we forget that the hearts of all men are in God's rule and governance, and that He does dispose and turn them as it seemeth best to His godly wisdom, we shall be sure to fall into sin. Angry words and passionate expressions will then prove, how much the enemy of our souls is making use of provocation to draw us into his snares. But let us remember at such a time the exhortation here given: "Be ye also patient, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh: behold, the Judge standeth before the door." If we do but bear our burdens patiently for a little while, and humbly and quietly endure unto the end, which cannot be very far off, the Judge will come and set all straight. When He shall appear, it will be to take vengeance upon them who have not known God, nor obeyed the Gospel; and He will recompense tribulation to them that have troubled us. While, on the other hand, to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour, and immortality, He will give eternal life. (See Rom. ii. 7.)

EXPLANATION.

Verse 13 to 18.—Instead of allowing our tongues to express angry feelings in time of trouble, St. James says, (13) When any one is in affliction, let him turn to God, and seek, by prayer, help to bear it; and in times of prosperity, let those who feel happy express their joy and thankfulness, by singing psalms. (14) When any of you are sick, let the elders of the church be sent for, those who are known to be men of experience and piety, let them pray for you, using oil as a symbol of God's grace. (15) And the prayer which is offered up with faith (through the power which God now bestows to work miracles) will save the sick. The Lord will raise him up; and if his sickness were the punishment of any particular sin, it will be forgiven. (16) It is most desirable that you should confess your faults one to another, and pray for each other, that so your diseases in mind and body may be healed; for the sincere and earnest prayer of one who is counted righteous before God, for Christ's sake, is most valuable, and may effect great things. (17) As a proof of this, look at the case of Elijah. He was a man with a nature like our own, weak and sinful, and yet he prayed earnestly to God to withhold all rain from the earth; and for the space of three years and a half there was no rain. (18) Again, he prayed that the affliction might be removed, and it was so, that the heavens again gave forth rain, and the earth was once more fruitful. This we find written in the 18th chapter of 1st Kings.

APPLICATION.

How we may hope to prosper in our souls under all circumstances.

This is a world of change. There are times when we feel light-hearted and happy ; and, again, there are times when all within and around looks dark and gloomy. But these changes are profitable to the real Christian, like the alternations of sunshine and rain to the seed sown in the earth, which are both alike necessary for ripening it, and making it fit for the harvest. As the seed would wither with nothing but sunshine, and rot with nothing but rain ; so the Christian would fade away under constant prosperity, and might sink in despair under ceaseless sorrow. But will these changes of circumstances universally produce the desired effect ? Is the seed of eternal life always sure to prosper, and bear fruit ? Alas ! no ; and the reason is, because the directions in this portion of Scripture are not attended to. St. James says, “ Is any among you afflicted ? Let him pray. Is any merry ? Let him sing psalms.” In order to follow this advice, we must make it our habitual endeavour to set the Lord always before us ; we must, like Moses, with an eye of faith, continually see Him who is invisible ; and then, indeed, when we thus live as in His sight, conscious that His eye is over us, and His hand dealing out to us our daily portion, we shall surely profit by, and prosper under, all that happens. Our sorrows will be lighter to bear, as well as made useful for our good, when we can acknow-

ledge them to be the chastenings of a tender Father. When we go to Him in prayer, to tell Him all we feel and all we wish, we are relieved of half our burden. It is like telling our sorrows to a sympathising friend, which is always a relief when the heart is oppressed with grief. Again, when worldly prosperity only excites our gratitude to God, and makes us more devout, our happiness is increased tenfold, because we can be happy with a clear conscience; while the mirth of an ungodly man is often accompanied by the stings of self-reproach, and never can give thorough satisfaction. If we would turn all to a good account, and really live a happy life, we must thus give ourselves to the Lord, making His service our delight; and then, let our outward changes be ever so great, we shall yet be able to say at all times, "It is well." All is working together for our good; and thus, though the days of miracles have passed away, still, in one sense, the prayer of faith may even now be said to heal the sick—for it heals the worst part of sickness, namely, the spirit of discontent. But besides this, we may also pray for the recovery of the sick, and believe in the efficacy of our prayers, while yet we add—Not my will, but Thine, O Lord, be done. However, in the passage before us, St. James evidently alludes to miracles, when speaking of the power of prayer, because he makes reference to Elijah, who, though a man like ourselves, was enabled by God to effect such things as it would be presumption in us to think of. Still, the efficacy of prayer is great, even in our hands—far greater than we are apt to believe; and for the want of this belief it fails. We, alas,

too often pray, expecting nothing ; with little earnestness, and less hope ; and how can we expect to prevail ? Now, although the example of Elijah cannot be set before us with the intention that we should expect to change the course of nature, it certainly is set before us to show that, whatever we wish for, if it be proper for us to have, we may have it by asking for it in a proper manner. And we are not only here told of the exceeding great value of prayer, as regards ourselves, but as regards one another. If we hope to prosper in our souls, we must diligently use all the help we can get ; we must be ready to seek for spiritual counsel and comfort, by telling our difficulties, and speaking of the sins which trouble and distress us, to those from whom we may expect advice, and we must ask the prayers of godly people. If the prayers of the righteous avail so much, why do we not earnestly seek for them ? Those who know the value of the soul, will be sure to ask their friends to pray for them, and be ready to return this favour, by seeking at God's hands a blessing on the souls of their friends.

EXPLANATION.

Verses 19 and 20.—As a concluding remark, St. James says, (19) Brethren, if any one among you should fall away from the true faith, and another should be happy enough to reclaim that wanderer, (20) let him, who is thus instrumental in bringing back a sinner from the error of his way, remember for his comfort, that he has saved a soul from death,

and been the means of procuring pardon for a multitude of sins.

APPLICATION.

That it is want of faith, that makes us careless of the souls of our fellow-creatures.

Surely if we did but consider what it is to save a soul from death, we should be more in earnest than we are, both to save our own souls, and, if possible, the souls of others. While the heart is given to the world, and while the things of time and sense wholly, or principally, occupy the mind, no wonder that hell and its horrors, and heaven and its joys, are forgotten. But we may well wonder how it is, that those who have had their eyes opened to see, in some measure, the value of their own souls, should be so indifferent, as the generality of Christians are, to the state of those whom they see around them ready to perish. Alas, faith is very weak even with those who are not altogether without it. There is nothing so important for us to do, as to endeavour to realize to our minds the things which are to come, of which we have heard, but which we have never seen. We have heard of heaven, and we have heard of hell, and we do not doubt there are such places; but how little are we affected by the prospect of being, every one of us, shortly in one or other of these places. Supposing we escape hell ourselves, how should we like to see any companion

or friend, whom we have known for years, suffering the torments of eternal fire? The idea is dreadful, when we allow ourselves time to reflect upon it! Yet, probably, if we were to see a fellow-creature writhing in agonies before a slow fire, which, sooner or later, must kill the poor sufferer, we should use much greater exertions to shorten the term of this suffering, than we have ever made to rescue one soul from the torments of hell, though we daily see around us such conduct as we know must, without timely repentance, assuredly lead there. Oh, let us think more frequently, and more seriously, of the value of the soul. Let us endeavour to bring before our mind's eye what must be the joy of being safe in heaven on the one side, and on the other, what the horror of finding oneself in hell. Surely, if we thus realized to ourselves the future world, there would be more zeal, more watchfulness, more anxiety manifested in regard to the great business of life. For what business can we have to do of such importance, as that of saving a soul alive. Many people are very kind to their fellow-creatures, in endeavouring to supply their present wants, who never look the least beyond their condition in this world. And how is it that the passing scene thus occupies all their care; that the body is thought of, and provided for, but not the soul? Is it not because people forget, that the soul is immortal, that it must continue either to enjoy, or to suffer, for ever and ever. Alas! alas! too little is thought about hiding that multitude of sins, of which we are all guilty; and which must weigh down the soul to perdition, if they are not now blotted out through faith in the precious

blood of Christ shed upon the cross; and if this were duly felt, and understood, we should all be convinced, that there is nothing of such consequence in the whole world as to obtain an interest in Christ, so that we may be counted faultless, when we stand in the presence of Almighty God. Let then this truth be well impressed upon our minds, namely, that all sin must either be *pardoned* or *punished*. And surely we shall then diligently strive, as opportunity may offer, to be the happy instrument of saving a soul, or, if possible, many souls from death, by leading them to Christ, and thus hiding a multitude of sins.

PRAYER.

Merciful and gracious Lord God, give me, I beseech Thee, just views upon the subject of riches. Grant that I may never desire wealth, but rather fear it, as a snare by which so many have been eternally ruined. Lord, grant that I may not seek after pleasure in this life, but enable me so to pass through my present state of trial, that I may hereafter be permitted to enjoy at Thy right hand pleasure for evermore. Under all present distresses grant that I may be patient, waiting in hope for the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. If it be Thy will that others should prosper, while I am afflicted, suffer me not to grudge them the happiness, which Thou art pleased to deny to me. Enable me to follow the teaching of those prophets, and holy men of old, who have left us an example how to suffer affliction with patience. Impress deeply on my

mind this truth, that Thou, Lord, art very pitiful, and of tender mercy. Above all things, preserve me from that irritation of temper, which leads to the use of bad language. In all seasons of affliction, give me grace to pray. In all times of mirth and gladness, give me the spirit of praise and holy joy. In the hour of sickness and death, grant me the consolation of praying friends, and enable me so to join with them in the prayer of faith, that I may be saved from all that is really evil in either sickness or death. Make me ever ready to pray for others, with earnest and effectual prayer; and to use all diligence in warning and exhorting sinners to turn from their evil ways. Grant that I may not only effectually believe in Christ myself, but may I also be a means, in Thy hands, of drawing others also to believe in Him, through whom only their souls can be saved from death, and the multitude of their sins be blotted out. Grant this, for His sake, who liveth and reigneth with Thee, O Father, and with the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF ST. PETER.

CHAPTER I.

VERSE 1 to 9.—The Epistles or letters of St. Peter are called general Epistles, because they are not addressed to any body of Christians collected together in one place, as was usually the case with those of St. Paul; nevertheless, from the opening salutation, we learn, that the one we are about to consider was intended, in an especial manner, for those Christians who were scattered about in various provinces of Asia. It opens thus: (1) Peter, one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, writes this letter to all Christians living as strangers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, (2) who, according to the foreknowledge, and appointment of God the Father, have been called unto obedience to the Gospel, through the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, and by the sprinkling of Christ's precious blood. To whom he says, May the favour of God, and that inward peace which flows from it, be your continually increasing portion. (3) Let us now bless and praise God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for having, of His great mercy, caused us to be born again, into

a state of lively hope, founded on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, even the hope of (4) an inheritance perfect in purity, and eternal in duration; an inheritance prepared in heaven for all those (5) who, by the power of God, are kept steadfast in faith; and thus made meet to partake of the salvation which is to be fully revealed at the last day. (6) In the prospect thus opened to you I feel sure that you greatly rejoice. Notwithstanding that for a time it may be necessary for you to suffer much affliction, on account of the many temptations by which you are surrounded. (7) These afflictions, however, are only intended by God as trials of your faith, which is more precious than gold, for that will perish, though it be purified by fire to the highest degree; but faith will be found to produce praise and honour and glory at the second coming of Jesus Christ. (8) And though you have never seen Jesus Christ with your bodily eyes, yet even now you love Him, and believing what He has done for you, you exceedingly rejoice in the prospect of that glory which hereafter you are to have with Him. (9) Thus you receive what is the object of your faith, namely, the saving of your soul.

APPLICATION.

That the doctrine of election is humiliating, and therefore often rejected.

All real Christians are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, having their home in heaven; and though it

is not certain that St. Peter meant to allude to this when he addressed his letter to the strangers scattered about in Asia, yet it is well that by this expression we should be reminded of our condition, and be led to meditate upon it. In order to profit by the Bible, we must take it home to ourselves; we must consider how it applies to our own case. And certainly the portion we are now considering may naturally and profitably suggest this inquiry, Am I living as a stranger upon earth, having my heart, and hope, and home in heaven? Again, we should consider how far the term elect may apply to ourselves. To elect is to choose; and God has chosen us, of His abundant mercy, to receive such a knowledge of His truth, as He has not seen fit to grant to the heathen world; but this may, or may not, prove a blessing in the end. Many, alas, have the privilege of hearing and understanding Gospel truth, who are not obedient to it. Here then comes the great and important question: Have I, like those to whom St. Peter wrote, been chosen unto obedience, through sanctification of the Spirit, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus? Have I any proof that, through the blessed work of the great triune Jehovah, the sound of the Gospel has not come to me in vain? Although it is very humiliating to our natural pride, to be completely indebted for salvation to works not our own, yet so it must be. No one can rightly rejoice in the prospect of a heavenly inheritance, who does not feel that he owes it altogether to the electing love of the Father, the atoning blood of the Son, and the sanctifying influences of the Spirit. It is humiliating also to our pride, to feel so wholly unable to under-

stand God's dealings with us. He setteth up one, and putteth down another, and we cannot tell why; only we are bound to acknowledge that there is no unrighteousness in Him. One of the especial purposes of religion is to destroy in us our natural disposition to pride, and to teach us humility, which those have not learned who reject the doctrine of God's electing grace, because they cannot understand it. God deals with us as we do with children, of whom we expect obedience, before they are capable of reasoning on the authority which we exercise over them. If then the reading of this portion of Scripture gives rise to a spirit of cavilling at the mysteries connected with God's electing love, it is a very bad sign. Whereas, if with deep humility, and unfeigned gratitude, we acknowledge that all our hope rests upon what God has done for us, and is doing in us, we may well rejoice in the bright prospect of that pure and perfect happiness which is set before us. We all have to die, and we feel that death is an awful thing; we may therefore indeed bless and praise God if He has begotten us again, that is, given us a new life, and opened before us the prospect of an eternal existence, made sure by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For as we believe that Jesus died and rose again; even so we believe that them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him, to enjoy an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Again, if we have this hope in us, then there is further joy in the reflection, that those to whom the inheritance belongs are kept, by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. Every real Christian feels that he is sur-

rounded by dangers, and that he is in himself full of weakness ; there cannot therefore be a greater comfort than to feel that we are kept by a power not our own : that we are guarded by the same Saviour who loved us, so as to die for us : and by Him who of His great mercy has adopted us into His own family. And not only does all our comfort depend upon our thus placing confidence in God, but our safety also ; for we are saved through faith. Not that we owe our salvation to our faith. No, we owe it to the power of God. Nevertheless, that power is made available to us by the exercise of faith ; just as in the case of a drowning sailor who is saved by clinging to a rope ; the rope saves him, and yet if he did not cling to it, he would perish. Now, then, if we are so happy as to think ourselves of the number of those, who are thus kept by the power of God for the enjoyment of a heavenly inheritance, we must not be surprised if for the present we are in heaviness. Not only is it true that man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards ; but for the Christian there is an especial need of affliction, inasmuch as affliction tries and purifies us, and makes conspicuous the power of the divine faith in us. No one can hope to be fitted for heaven without the purifying process of affliction, which is, to the Christian, what fire is to gold ; it both proves, and improves the metal. The variety of ways by which we are tried are endless, and all more or less painful and distressing ; and yet in our darkest hour we have the surest and best source of joy, if, by faith, we can see Him whom we love. And with the full assurance that He feels for us, we may well rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 10 to 12.—St. Peter had been showing how, by faith in Christ, the salvation of the soul is secured; and now he proceeds to say, (10) It was respecting this salvation that the Prophets of old were so anxious to know more. Those who prophesied of the grace that was to be bestowed upon us made diligent inquiry to know, if possible, (11) at what particular period all would happen, of which the Holy Spirit (given to them by Jesus Christ) enabled them to speak, namely, respecting the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which was to follow. (12) But they were made to understand that it was not for themselves, but for us, and for our benefit, that they were employed in prophesying of the Gospel dispensation; in the knowledge of which you have now been instructed by persons guided by the Holy Ghost, sent down from heaven. But these things are so full of solemn mystery, that even the Angels in heaven long to stoop down and look into them, that they may obtain more knowledge concerning them.

APPLICATION.

The fearful state of those who are unconcerned about the Gospel.

Such is the awfully glorious nature of that salvation, which has been wrought out for us by the sufferings of an incarnate God, that no created being who has any just conception of it can fail of

being deeply affected with wonder, love, and praise. The Prophets of old, who wrote of the sufferings of Christ, and of the benefits to be thence derived to man, were diligent in seeking to know all they might concerning things so wonderful, and in which they knew they were personally interested. But they were employed to foretell future events, chiefly for the purpose of affording a testimony to the truth of Christ's mission, when, in the fulness of time, He should appear. And probably they knew but little of that to which their writings referred. While to us, the prophecies are made clear and plain, by their being fulfilled: still, though life and immortality have been brought to light by the Gospel, and on us the light has shined, we have yet much to learn. The most spiritually enlightened Christian knows but little, comparatively speaking, of the breadth and length, and depth and height of the love of Christ, which, in fact, passeth knowledge. Even the Angels that surround the throne of God are represented as reflecting upon this wonder of wonders, and desiring to know more of the final object of such a mysterious display of mercy. And what must we think, then, of those human beings for whom such mercy has been shown, who live and die wholly unconcerned and indifferent about it! Must not theirs be indeed an awful condition? How fearfully must Satan have hardened their hearts, and closed their eyes, against what it most concerns them to be anxious about. Reader, how are you affected concerning the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that is to follow; a glory in which all penitent sinners may hope to share with their exalted Saviour? Can you say that this is a subject of the deepest interest to you? one on

which your thoughts delight to dwell, from a happy consciousness that you have a personal interest in it? Whatever we feel really touches ourselves is sure to interest us. Therefore, if we are indifferent and careless about what Christ has done and suffered, it is a sure sign that we have no very clear expectation of sharing in the glory which is to follow. Let it, then, be regarded as a very bad sign, if other matters on which depend only our welfare in this world, excite a livelier interest than those things into which the prophets of old so diligently searched, and the Angels of heaven now desire to look. The Angels are not personally interested in what Christ did upon earth, for they have never experienced the miseries of sin, and consequently have no hell to fear; and yet they interest themselves in the work of redemption. There is a great joy, we are told, among them whenever any one of us accepts the offered mercy. Ought we not, then, to feel grieved and ashamed, when we reflect how coldly and indifferently these things are regarded among us? Yes, we must indeed all stand condemned, for we are all far, far too little affected by the love which has been shown to us, and the glorious prospects which Christ has opened to our view. But if this coldness and deadness of heart is truly our grief, it will not be our ruin. The case may be sad, and yet not hopeless, if with sincerity we can appeal to Him who knoweth all things, and say:

“ Lord, it is my chief complaint,
That my love is cold and faint;
Yet I love Thee and adore,
O for grace to love Thee more!”

EXPLANATION.

Verse 13 to 16.—St. Peter from having spoken of the great advantages which we, who live under the gospel dispensation, possess over those who lived before the coming of Christ, is led to make the following exhortation; he says, (13) Therefore, being so highly favoured, let me urge you to gird up the loins of your mind; that is, prepare yourself for great exertion in running your Christian course; just as those who wear long flowing robes are obliged to gird them up, in preparation for any vigorous exercise. Take a sober and serious view of all things connected with true happiness, and keep in mind the end. Remember how the favour of God will shine upon you, and bless you, when Jesus Christ shall appear at the great judgment day. (14) Be like obedient children, not yielding to your sinful inclinations, as you did formerly in the days of your ignorance. (15) But according as He, who has called you into His family, is holy, so do you try to be holy. (16) For it is written in the Book of Leviticus: “You shall be holy; for I, the Lord your God, am holy.”

APPLICATION.

If we desire to be real Christians, we must make up our minds for a hard fight.

Whenever we think of our great privileges as members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of

eternal life, we ought at the same time to remember what, under such circumstances, must be required of us. If we reflect with pleasure on the glorious end which awaits the real Christian, we must at the same time consider that, for the present, there is much to suffer. There is no use in blinding our eyes to this fact. The natural desires and inclinations of the human heart lead one way, while the call of God leads another. We cannot resist our inclinations, and attend to the call of God, without a painful exertion. To become holy, as He who has called us is holy, cannot be done without a desperate struggle. We must not only keep up a constant watchfulness, and exercise a self-denial, not at all pleasing to flesh and blood, but, we must also expect that God will discipline us by many trials, and purify us in the fires of affliction, before we can be fitted for the glory and happiness which we are looking forward to, at the coming of Jesus Christ. Reader, are you in earnest when you say, you desire to be a real Christian? Then if so, gird up the loins of your mind, that is to say, make up your mind at once that this life is not to be one of ease and comfort; but a state of trial—a scene of conflict. And resolve at once, that you will not give way to the indulgence of the flesh, or the inclinations of an evil heart, but that you will become a self-denying follower of Him who said, “If any man will come after me let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” Alas! too many people never look the truth fairly in the face. They consider that God is very merciful, and they do not give themselves the trouble to consider, that He is at the

same time very holy, and that He requires of us, who by nature are unholy, that we should be thoroughly changed, and become altogether new creatures, before ever we can enter the kingdom of heaven. If this, which is the true state of the case, were well considered, people could not make such a mistake as to suppose they were going to heaven (as many do) while they are living altogether for this world, and taking little or no pains to prepare for a better. While they swim carelessly along the stream of time, they flatter themselves that death, when it comes, is to land them safely on the shore of eternity. But this is quite a mistake. Reader, mark this: you are either making great exertions to save your soul, or you have no right at all to suppose it ever will be saved.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 17 to 25.—As a further incitement to holiness, St. Peter says, (17) If you can call upon God as your Father, knowing that He will show no partiality to any one, but judge all fairly according to their works, be mindful to spend the time of your continuance upon earth in a watchful anxiety not to offend so good a God. (18) That He is good and merciful, you well know, because at no trifling expense—no, not even with silver and gold—did He purchase your obedience from that sinful course of life in which you had been brought up. (19) But He gave, as your ransom, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, who, like a lamb, was offered a pure and spot-

less sacrifice. (20) That Jesus Christ should deliver the world from the curse of sin was determined even before the world was made. But this was not fully made known until He appeared upon earth for your salvation, (21) who believe in Him; and by Him, and the preaching of His Gospel, you are led to have a firmer faith in God, who has raised our blessed Redeemer from the dead, and given Him everlasting glory. So that your faith and hope are thus the more strongly fixed on God. (22) Now, then, since your hearts are purified by receiving, through the help of the Spirit, the Gospel of truth, which, above all things, teaches love, see to it that you do indeed love one another most sincerely. (23) For you are born again, not by means of any thing that can perish, but by means of God's holy Word, which will endure for ever and ever. (24) For our mortal natures are like grass, which grows up and is cut down directly; and all those ornaments of our nature, in which men glory so much, are but like the flowers which adorn the grass. And as the grass withers, the flowers fade with it. (25) But the Word of the Lord endures for ever, and will procure eternal life for those who receive it. And this eternal truth is what we, ministers of the Gospel, preach unto you.

APPLICATION.

The purifying effect of rightly receiving Gospel truth.

The wealth of the whole world, or many worlds,

could not save one soul. Silver and gold cannot buy eternal life. How foolish, then, to set our hearts upon that which can do us so little good. But, oh ! how ought we to value and love that Saviour, who has paid a price sufficient to procure the ransom of our immortal souls. Precious, most precious to us, must be that blood, which was shed to open to us the gate of everlasting life. We could not have called upon God as our Father, if we had had none to intercede for us. Considering Him only as an offended Father, we must have shrunk from Him, trembling under the expectation of His threatened wrath. Now we need fear Him, only as a dutiful child fears to offend a tender parent. And now let us endeavour to estimate the value of our souls, by thinking upon that enormous price which has been paid to deliver us out of the hand of the enemy. To redeem, is, by purchase, to deliver a slave out of the hand of a cruel master : and the vain conversation or way of living from which we are said to be redeemed, was a sign of our bondage to the worst of masters, even Satan, from whom none, but God Himself, could ever have set us free. And that He should have been willing to die upon the cross to obtain our freedom, must prove that the case we were in was desperate, and dreadful indeed. It could be no small misery which so moved to compassion the Son of God, as to make Him willing to try to deliver us at such an expense of suffering to Himself. Yes, He tried to deliver us ; He was most anxious to deliver us ; He did all that was necessary to deliver us ; but has the end been accomplished. Are we, after all, made free from that sin which worketh

death, and misery everlasting? That such a deliverance is now to be had, is a glorious truth. But have we purified our hearts, by obeying the truth through the Spirit? Alas! alas! how many have heard of the free offer of pardon and deliverance through the precious blood of Jesus, and turned a deaf ear to it. Many have no wish to be delivered from their vain conversation. They choose the service of Satan in spite of its consequences; that is to say, they are willing rather to endure hereafter the torments of hell for ever, than not be allowed to indulge their sinful inclinations, or their bad humours, for the present time. But there are some who thankfully accept the offer of mercy through Christ; and they show they have accepted it, by effectually resisting those hateful tempers, and bad dispositions, with which all, more or less, are born. Here, then, is a great subject for inquiry: there are many for whom Christ has died in vain; His precious blood was of value enough to have bought the salvation of the whole world; but the whole world will not be saved. Let us, then, consider carefully, and put this question to ourselves, Have I believed the truth to the purifying of my soul, or have I not? Am I born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God? The Word of God is faithfully preached and explained in our churches, and we have the opportunity, every one of us, of studying that Word for ourselves. What effect has it had upon us? Has the Holy Spirit, through whom alone we can effectually profit by it, sent it home to our hearts with purifying power? One thing is certain: if we have obeyed the truth through

the Spirit, it has taught us to love one another, with a pure heart, fervently. We know it is written, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And where is the proof that we are born again of incorruptible seed, if we are allowing ourselves to indulge, unrestrained, such tempers and conduct as are opposed to the law of love? Wrath, strife, and jealousy are the fruits of the devil, and not of the Spirit of God. But it may be that we find the struggle with sin very severe; it is no easy matter to overcome the naturally evil dispositions of our hearts, and we may, therefore, be ready to despond, when, perhaps, we only require encouragement, and a continued exertion in fighting the fight of faith. Let us, then, ask this question, Am I heartily endeavouring to overcome the evil that is within? Do I feel the excellency and beauty of holiness, and am I striving after purity in every thought and word? If so, then, although we may be far from what we wish to be, yet we may rejoice in the hope, that an incorruptible seed is sown within us, which will grow up, and, by God's grace, increase unto perfection.

PRAYER.

O God, Heavenly Father, I humbly confess that I am a miserable sinner, who can only be saved through Thy electing love, the sanctifying of the Holy Spirit, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grant that by the power of Thy grace I may be obedient to the voice of Thy written Word,

and live as becomes a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth. I heartily desire to thank Thee, that through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, Thou hast blessed me with the hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Oh, grant me faith to believe all which Thou hast revealed to us of the way of salvation, that I may know the truth, and greatly rejoice in it. If it be Thy will to bring me into heaviness through manifold temptations, grant that these trials of my faith may do me good, and may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom, having not seen, teach me to love; in whom, though now I see Him not, yet believing, help me to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; so shall I attain the end of my faith, even the salvation of my soul. I beseech Thee in mercy to turn the hearts of those, who now despise the riches of Thy love, and care not to benefit by that salvation, concerning which the Prophets of old inquired and searched diligently, and into which even the Angels desire to look. Lord, I beseech Thee, strengthen me for the journey of life. Teach me now to gird up the loins of my mind, that I may run with patience the race that is set before me, looking unto the end with hope, that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will then be fully mine. As Thou, Lord, art holy, so make me holy in all manner of conversation. And since a day is coming in the which Thou wilt judge every man according to his work, teach me to pass the time of my sojourning here in fear. Make me to feel the exceeding greatness of Thy love, in

having purchased our redemption, not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot. Grant that my faith and hope may be in Him ; and that my soul may be purified in obeying the truth, through the Spirit. Lord, help me to love all my fellow-creatures, with a pure heart, fervently ; and give me the blessed hope that I am indeed born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the power of Thy Word, which liveth and abideth for ever. To Thee, O Heavenly Father, with the Son, and Holy Ghost, be glory and honour, for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 1 to 4.—At the close of the last chapter, St. Peter had been speaking on the subject of a spiritual new birth. Those to whom he wrote were, he said, born again of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God ; and he is alluding to this when he says, (1) Therefore you must put away from you all malice, all deceit, all envious feelings, all evil speaking, (2) and, as babes feed on their mother's milk, so you must feed on the Word of God, in order that you may grow more and more perfect in all holiness. (3) And if, as I trust, you have already had some

experience to teach you that the Lord Jesus Christ is very gracious, (4) then be encouraged to come to Him as to a living stone in God's temple, to be built upon Him, for though He has been rejected of men, He is chosen of God and precious.

APPLICATION.

The Bible the necessary food of the soul.

The soul cannot live without nourishment any more than the body. If a new-born babe is left without food, it dies; and, in like manner, if any one so neglects his soul, as to pay little or no attention to the written Word of God, can we wonder if that soul should be eternally lost? Two things are here put before us by the Apostle, as absolutely necessary, if we would save our souls alive. In the first place, we must resist, and put from us all unholy tempers and wrong dispositions; and, secondly, study the Bible. Unless we bring religion into practice, and make it bear upon our characters and conduct in life, it is absolutely worth nothing. A man may talk about the incorruptible seed of the Word, and flatter himself that he is thereby born again; but if malice, and envy, and uncharitableness are suffered to dwell in his heart, his boasting is vain; there can be no real spiritual life in that soul. Again, we may observe, that though a habit of reading the Scriptures regularly is not of itself enough to prove that we are spiritually alive, yet the neglect of the Bible is

a sure sign of spiritual death. The Word of God must not only be read, but read with a humble mind, and prayerful spirit, in order that we may grow thereby. Its holy truths must be received into the heart, and not merely understood by the head. We must not only read, but carefully mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. We must value the Bible and study it, not for our amusement, as we would any other book, but as a means of becoming acquainted with the mind and will of God, in order that we may be moulded according to the same. If, then, we would wish to know anything of the real condition of our souls, let us judge ourselves by considering in what light we regard the Scriptures. Alas ! how many there are who have no value at all for the Word of God. Cheap as Bibles are, some people will live half their lives without possessing this guide to heaven. Who can wonder if, in consequence, they never find the way there. Others have a Bible, but it stands week after week unopened on the shelf. And do they ever ask the important question, "What must I do to be saved?" Alas ! no ; evidently they are not afraid of being lost. They know not how likely they are to perish, that is to say, to fall into those flames which cannot be quenched ; if they did, they surely would wish to know the way of escape from such a dreadful end. But of those who do read the Bible daily, how many there are to whom it is but a mere form ; and this is nothing better than it would be, for a man to look upon his food without eating it ; and what good would that do him ? Think with what eagerness a healthy child desires the food that nature has pro-

vided for it. Let this teach us how, according to the Apostle's similitude, we ought to desire to feed upon the Word of God, if we would grow thereby. Man, in his natural state, does not thus relish Scripture truth, because he has not tasted that the Lord is gracious. But to God's true children, who know the sweetness of His grace and mercy, it becomes as the food in which they delight; they feel that without it they cannot live, because without it they cannot grow in the knowledge of Christ, who is the living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, most precious indeed to all who have learned to know His value. Therefore the Scriptures are felt to be as needful to the soul, as bread is to the body. If this is what we feel, it is indeed a good sign. Let us thank God, and take courage.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 5 to 10.—St. Peter having spoken of Christ as a living stone, goes on to speak of His disciples under the same figure; he says, (5) You yourselves are the living stones, of which God's house is built. You are the priests who must offer to God that spiritual service of prayer and praise, which is acceptable to Him through Jesus Christ. (6) And observe, we find in the Old Testament that our Saviour is prophesied of under the figure of a stone; for in the 28th chapter of Isaiah, ver. 16, it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste." (7)

To you, therefore, who trust in Him as the foundation of all your hopes, He is most precious; but as regards those who are disobedient and unbelieving, He is, though rejected by them, still a stone; but it is as (8) a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, against which, because they resist the Word of God, they are shattered: even as it had been appointed in the decrees of the Almighty, that such punishment should be the doom of the unbelieving and disobedient. (9) But you, to whom I write, are a people chosen of God out of the unbelieving world, to be to Him as priests offering up your whole selves a sacrifice to His love and service, and standing forth as a peculiar people, in respect of holiness, in order that you may bring praise and honour to Him, who has thus called you out of the darkness of ignorance and sin into the wonderful light of the blessed Gospel. (10) According to what was said by the Prophet Hosea, you, who were not in times past His people, are now the people of God; you who formerly were not the objects of any peculiar mercy, are so now. (See Hosea ii. 23.)

APPLICATION.

Hearts united by faith to Christ form the only temple acceptable unto God.

In common conversation, when we speak of a church, or of God's house, we mean the building in which God is worshipped. But we ought to remark, that, in Scriptural language, the church means the

family of Christ, and the stones of which His house is built are individual Christians. Thus we are taught to look beyond material things, and to learn that it is not a visible, but a spiritual building, which God requires. Precious stones, such as rubies and diamonds, we consider very valuable; but a building altogether formed of such rich material would be utterly worthless in the sight of God, unless filled by those whom He calls “lively stones;” that is, living beings, who offer to Him a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable through Jesus Christ. For God is a Spirit; and it is only the spiritual worshipper, the devout and holy soul, who can yield Him a service, which He will accept. And now, let it be observed, we can be lively, or living stones, only by reason of our connexion with Christ, the corner-stone. God has chosen Him to be the foundation of every thing. He must be our all in all, our only dependence, from whom alone we look for life, and strength, to do anything pleasing to God, or else we have no place among the stones in God’s house. A little reflection on the obvious meaning of this passage of Scripture will soon show us how certainly Christ must be all and every thing to us. We never need fear having our minds too much occupied with Him; but we have great reason to fear that we may not sufficiently build upon Him. We shall look in vain for mercy and favour from God, if we expect it without seeking it through Him, whom He has laid as the foundation stone in Zion, that is, Jesus Christ. If we heartily desire to be built up into Him, and made one with Him, then we shall indeed find Him to be a precious corner-stone, and that, trusting in Him, we shall not

be confounded. Here confidence is well placed, and will not disappoint. But those who fancy their good lives will recommend them to God, and who are unbelieving, and disobedient to the teaching of God's holy Word, will find, that in rejecting Christ they have ruined themselves. For, be it observed, Christ is represented to us under the image of a stone, on which we may either most securely build, or against which we may stumble, and then, in the end, it will fall on us, and grind us to powder. And now, Reader, consider with yourself whether you are a living stone, built up into God's temple. See whether you are in any respect trusting to yourself and your own exertions, or whether you are altogether seeking support and comfort from Him who is the tried corner-stone, the sure foundation. Can you, with St. Paul, say, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me?" Thus, if you have reason to hope that your foundation is laid on Christ, and that you are one of those lively stones who are built up into Him, as a spiritual house, think what manner of person you must be in all holy conversation and godliness. Mark the titles which, under these circumstances, belong to you. You are one of "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." And for what is all this? It is that you may "show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." By the peculiar holiness of your life and conduct God must be honoured. If we are His people, if we have obtained mercy at His hands, it is not that we may have whereof to glory, but that we may

render glory, and honour, and praise to Him who hath redeemed us unto Himself, by His own most precious blood.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 11 to 17.—Having just mentioned the high honour to which, as chosen people of God, his Christian converts were called, St Peter now reminds them of the sort of life it would be necessary for them to lead; and thus affectionately exhorts them to it: (11) My dearly beloved brethren, I beg of you to remember, that as you are to pass through this world as strangers and pilgrims, you must be careful to deny yourselves in the indulgence of all those fleshly lusts, which are so hurtful to the soul. (12) Let your whole conduct and conversation be upright, in the sight of the Gentiles; so that though for a time they may speak against you in the spirit of malice, and call you evil-doers, yet that they may in the end acknowledge your good works, to the glory of God, when he shall, in His mercy, visit them with His salvation. (13) Submit yourselves quietly to all human authority, out of regard to the will of God, whether it be to the king as supreme, (14) or to any other sort of governor; knowing that God has appointed them all for the purpose of punishing vice, and rewarding virtue. (15) In this manner it is the will of God that you should prove how ignorantly those speak, who say, that your religion leads to rebellion. (16) It is true you are free; but never let that freedom be made a cloak for covering evil deeds, but act always as becomes the servants of a

holy God. (17) Pay a due respect to all your fellow-creatures. Love those who are your brethren in Christ. Fear God, and honour the king.

APPLICATION.

That a Christian cannot prosper without much watchfulness
and self-denial.

If we are the real children of God, of whom it may be said, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," then we are not of this world, we are as strangers in it, and as pilgrims travelling to a better land, and having our home above, to which blessed country we are looking forward with hope and desire, waiting for the coming of God. Under these circumstances, it is obviously our interest, as well as our duty, to watch against every thing by which our progress to that better world may be hindered. Again and again we shall be tempted to indulge the inclinations of that evil nature which it is the business of the Christian's life to crucify and destroy. The journey to heaven is always a warfare; we have to fight our way through a host of enemies, to whom if we yield, we are ruined and undone. Let us, therefore, remember at all times, that to obtain the mastery over our carnal desires is absolutely necessary to the safety of the soul. Not only is it necessary to resist those desires of the flesh, which are actually sinful, but, like St. Paul, we must keep under the body, and bring it into subjection, if we are really desirous of

making a safe journey to the land of everlasting rest. The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and these are contrary the one to the other. We cannot live a life of self-indulgence, and yet the soul be healthy and vigorous. Moreover, it is not our safety alone which ought to be considered, but the effect of our conduct upon others. A Christian desires not only to go to heaven when he dies; but while he lives, to live to the glory of God, and for the good of his fellow-creatures. So here St. Peter puts forward, as a motive for watchfulness and exertion, the effect to be produced on the minds of others by the power of example. It is true, that the conduct and character of pious people are not always admired by the world; on the contrary, it often happens that the most truly religious are those who are the most spoken against. Their conduct conveys a silent reproof, which is often cruelly resented; and false accusations are the consequence. But it not unfrequently happens, that the enemies of godliness are converted; and then, when God is pleased to visit their souls with the conviction of their own sinfulness, they glorify God by acknowledging the power of His grace, as manifested in the conscientious behaviour of those, they had previously spoken of as evil-doers. A consistent conduct maintained throughout, will, in general, have its effect in producing conviction on the minds of those, who bring up a false report against religion. One of the false accusations often raised against Christianity is, that it makes men rebellious against lawful authority. We ought, therefore, to be most careful in this matter, in order that we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. So far from religion loosening the ties which

bind men together in social relationships, it strengthens them, by giving a new motive for their fulfilment, viz., obedience and love to God. His commandment is, that we love one another, and that we be in subjection one to another. So that if all were real Christians, there would be no harshness in the use of authority ; but if one party fails in their duty, the other is not thereby released ; obedience is a duty, even when those who have power, do not exercise it as they ought to do. We are called upon to honour all men, that is, to pay them due respect, according to their station, however little they may personally deserve it. And this we must do, because we fear God : we fear to disobey His law.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 18 to 21.—To specify more particularly in what manner Christians must be in subjection one to another, St. Peter says, (18) Servants, it is your duty to submit to your masters, from a fear of God ; and that, not only when they are gentle and kind, but also when they are ill-tempered and unreasonable. (19) For that man is worthy of praise, who from a conscientious desire of pleasing God, can patiently endure severe treatment, which he has not deserved. (20) But what is there to boast of, if you are patient only under the reproofs, which your faults have deserved. But if you do right, and suffer for it, and still are patient, then God is well pleased ; (21) and it is this which your religion requires of you. For you know that Christ also suffered in this way, and it is His example we are bound to follow.

APPLICATION.

That Christ's religion and example teach us patience and submission.

Here we see how very very far the Christian religion is from teaching rebellion. It teaches, on the contrary, what the world would call abject submission. If we take the example of Christ for our guide—and this is what we are bound to do, if we profess to be His disciples—we must study to be patient, and quietly endure any provocation. Happily in this country there is no such thing as slavery; therefore a servant has it always in his power to leave a froward master, but circumstances may render it very difficult; and sometimes people are so placed in connexion with those who are ill-tempered and unkind, that they really cannot get away. Then the line of duty is plain. Submission, with patience, is what the Christian must exercise. And it is no small encouragement, under such painful and difficult circumstances, to remember, that so to suffer is acceptable in the sight of God. And also, that it is in strict conformity with the example set us by Christ, who for no fault of His own, but purely out of love for those who hated Him, endured all manner of sufferings, as St. Peter goes on to say.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 22 to 25.—Jesus Christ never committed sin, nor was there any deceit in Him. (23) When He was abused, He offered no abuse in return. He used no threatening language when He received ill usage, but submitted His cause to God, who judgeth rightly. (24) He bore the punishment due to our sins, when His body hung upon the cross; and this He did in order that our sinful nature being put to death in Him, we might have grace and power to live a godly life; and thus it is that, by His sufferings, your wounds are healed. (25) For as the Prophet Isaiah said, You were like sheep going astray, but now you are returned under the guidance and control of Him, who, as a shepherd or bishop, careth for your souls.

APPLICATION.

That many people mistake the object for which Christ died.

Instead of following the pattern of long-suffering patience, left us by Jesus Christ, how often do His professed disciples and followers revile and threaten one another; plainly showing that they have more the will than the power to do evil. It is, indeed, a most fearful thing to observe how much quarrelling and ill-will reign among those, of whom one might

have hoped that they, being dead to sin, would live unto righteousness. It is from not understanding the great object for which Christ came into the world, that those who call themselves Christians are so little like their blessed Lord and Master. Many people think that He came merely to set us an example of holiness; others (and they the greater number) that He came to bear the punishment of our sins, and, therefore, that we need have no more anxiety about them: they consider heaven as ensured to all who call themselves Christians, except such only as are very bad indeed. Now the truth is, our Saviour's object was to make us new creatures. Not only would He have us to dwell hereafter in heaven instead of hell, but He would have us now, while we live upon earth, to be thoroughly changed from what we were by nature. This is plain, from the passage before us, if we will but consider it. Why did He bear our sins in His own body on the tree? Was it that we might go on comfortably in the old course, sinning, and fearing nothing? No; we are told, He did it in order "that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness." He died, in order that our sinful nature might die in us. It was to give us deliverance from the power of Satan, which every one lives under, who is not saved from it, by having come under the power of Christ. Moreover, it is written, "by His stripes we are healed." Healed of what? Why, surely of the deadly disease of sin. Now, if this was Christ's object in dying for us, how little do those understand it, or are likely to profit by it, who, instead of making it their chief business in this life to get a new heart

and a right spirit, suffer their minds to wander as they please, their affections to settle as chance may direct, and their tempers to rule without control. Such as these are still as sheep going astray. Their corrupt hearts and evil tempers still lead them captive, though the power to throw off this bondage has been obtained for them, and is offered to them, through Christ Jesus. If our blessed Lord had simply set us an example, and called upon us to follow it in our own strength, His death would have done us no good; for how could we have fought against sin, while bound hand and foot, as we may say, by Satan? But, happily for us, Jesus Christ triumphed over Satan on the cross. That triumph was gloriously displayed, when, after His resurrection, He ascended into heaven, and, as a mighty conqueror, led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men: that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit. And we are frequently encouraged by the delightful promise, that God will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. Now, Reader, consider well this subject, and see whether you have properly understood what Christ has done for you, and what you, in consequence, are bound to do for yourself. Are you striving to form your character after the pattern of Christ, and daily looking to Him for the grace and strength you need? or, on the contrary, are you giving way to your natural temper and disposition, and following your own inclinations, without even taking pains to ascertain what are the faults of your character, much less to alter them? If this be the case, remember you are still as a wandering sheep, far off from the safe and happy fold of Christ. You have

not so considered the end and object of Christ's crucifixion as to be able to say, By His stripes I am healed. No, you cannot say it, for you are not healed. And yet surely we *ought* to be able to say this; if not, woe be unto us! If the deadly wound we have received from the enemy of our souls is not healed by Christ, we are lost, ruined, and undone. And yet we must never imagine that we are healed, until we have learned to hate all sin, even the very least; and are earnestly striving to put it all from us, not only in action, but even in thought. Unless this be the case, we must not flatter ourselves that we have returned from our wanderings, to be under the control of the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. But perhaps with a most sincere and earnest desire to conquer every unholy temper, we may find it a work of such difficulty, as to be almost in despair, and inclined to think that, if we were really dead to sin through faith in Jesus Christ, our evil tempers would be more easily subdued. But no; to conquer sin is not an easy thing, or a thing to be soon accomplished, even by those who may justly reckon themselves to be dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ. When we are thoroughly alive to the evil of sin, and in earnest to fight against it, through the power of Christ, then we may thus reckon, because we may reckon upon final victory. If Christ be for us, who or what can be against us? He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He made there a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for all sin, except that which is not repented of. The question, therefore, is not, Am I free from sin? but, Am I humbled on

account of it? Am I carefully marking and grieving over everything which is contrary to the mind and will of Christ, and striving, with prayer and watchfulness, to conquer it? Mark this: there are two things equally to be guarded against, carelessness on the one hand, and despondency on the other. If we hope to grow in the divine life, we must add to our own exertions a lively faith in what Christ has done for us by His death, and what He is doing for us by His intercessions at the throne of grace, and by the supply of His Holy Spirit.

PRAYER.

Merciful Lord God, I beseech Thee, for Christ's sake, help me to put away all feelings of malice, and envy, all evil-speaking, and all manner of hypocrisy. Teach me to value the Holy Scriptures as precious food for my soul; and grant that, by the study of them, I may be brought to feel more and more how gracious and how merciful Thou art. Help me to grow in the knowledge of my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and to feel, with increasing joy, that He is the true and precious corner-stone, on which rest all my hopes of everlasting life; and grant that, as a living stone, I may be built up into Him, and enabled, through Him, to offer unto Thee an acceptable sacrifice of prayer and praise. Lord, impress deeply on my mind the privileges of my Christian calling. Make me very earnest in my endeavours to live as becomes one of a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people. O

Lord, I do indeed desire to show forth Thy praise, who hast called me out of darkness into marvellous light. Assist me, gracious Lord, to walk as becomes a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth. Enable me to keep under due restraint all the desires of the flesh. Give me grace so to order my conduct and conversation in the world, that those who are inclined to speak evil of religion may find no just occasion for doing so on my account ; but, on the contrary, grant that they, beholding my good works, may be constrained to glorify Thee, O Lord. I desire, with all humility, to submit myself to every ordinance of man for Thy sake. I beseech Thee to put it into the hearts of all kings and governors to use their power wisely for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. And I pray that all who call themselves Christians may understand the true nature of Gospel freedom, and never use their liberty as a cloak of maliciousness ; but teach me, and all who profess to be Thy servants, justly to honour all men, to love one another, and to fear, above all things, to offend Thee. Give Thy grace to all Christian servants, that they may be subject to their masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. Grant Thy help to all who suffer wrongfully, that they may take it patiently, knowing that to endure grief for conscience sake is acceptable unto Thee. Lord, help us all to be followers of Christ, who suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps. Grant that, if reviled, I may never revile again, but submit myself to Thee, who judgest righteously. Lord, grant that I may be indeed dead to sin, and alive to

righteousness, through faith in Christ, who bore the punishment my sins deserved. O Lord Jesus, be ~~Thou~~ evermore the Shepherd and Bishop of my soul, to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be glory, and honour, and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER III.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 1 to 7.—In the last chapter St. Peter had been speaking of the duty of subjects being submissive to their king, or other governors, and of servants to their masters. He now proceeds to show that in the same manner submission to the authority of a husband is the duty of a wife, and enjoins it in connection with a reason most encouraging and comforting to the mind of any religious woman, who may be so unhappy as to be united to an ungodly husband. He says (1) Wives, be obedient to your husbands; and if any of you have a husband who is not guided by the Word of God, let him see the power of religion in your life and conduct so forcibly, that, without anything being said, he may be convinced of his own errors, and won over to the side of religion, by observing its blessed effects in your behaviour. (2) Let him see it producing in you modesty, propriety, and a fear of doing wrong. (3) Adorn yourselves with something better than outward apparel. (4)

Let your chief attention be paid to the state of your inner man, to the feelings and affections of your heart, which are not of the same perishable nature, as are all things connected with your outward appearance. Let your chief ornament be that of a meek and quiet spirit, which is highly acceptable in the sight of God. (5) This was the way in which those holy women who trusted in God, and of whom we read in the Old Testament, adorned themselves, yielding a willing obedience to their husbands; (6) as, for instance, Sarah, who obeyed Abraham, and called him her lord, whose daughters you are, while you carefully endeavour to do your duty, without giving way to slavish fear. (7) In like manner, husbands, see that you do your duty to your wives, according to what you know to be right, showing a respectful tenderness towards her, who, from being the weaker of the two, requires the more kindness. At the same time that she is equally, with yourself, an heir to all the glories of heaven, which, by the grace of God, are placed within your reach. By thus living in love, there will be nothing to hinder you in drawing near to God by prayer.

APPLICATION.

The importance of maintaining consistency of character, and domestic harmony.

However little our corrupt hearts may relish the duty of submission, as taught us in the Scriptures, it is

nevertheless true, that if we would be happy we must comply with it ; for in every society of human beings, great or small, confusion will reign, if there is no head. When all think they have an equal right to manage, and none are willing to submit, things can never go on well. Pride makes subjection painful ; but submission with humility brings peace. Wisdom, therefore, as well as duty, teaches us to cultivate an humble spirit, so that we may be ready, when required, to yield obedience to our superiors. In the early days of Christianity, it was likely that sometimes a wife might become a Christian, when her husband was a heathen ; in which case, we cannot but see how very important it was, that the husband should be led to form a favourable impression of Christianity, from seeing the good effects produced by it in the conduct and character of his wife. Now, the same thing is true in the present day ; for, although in this country all are nominally Christians, yet, alas ! there are still many wives who have husbands that obey not the Word. God's Word has been set before them, it may be, from their youth, but they are not obedient to it ; in which case there is nothing so likely to be of use to the husband as seeing religion exemplified in all its pure, and holy, and happy effects, in the daily life of her whose conduct and character he must thoroughly know. But it matters not whether it be a wife who is anxious about her husband, or a husband about his wife, or whether it be any other relation or friend whose spiritual interests we wish to forward, the rule holds good in all cases, that if we wish to be of use, and to influence others for good, we must be careful that our conduct

preaches as well as our words. Many people can talk about religion, who show no signs of its power and effect upon their own hearts; and little good can they do. Example goes far beyond precept; and that is what all should remember who hope to be of any use. But especially parents should remember this. How can they expect to bring up children to be religious, if they do not set before them a religious example? The advice St. Peter gives to wives, respecting the inner and the outer man, we shall all do well to attend to. It may be thought by some that adorning the body is one way of gaining the affections of our fellow-creatures. And no doubt a proper attention to personal appearance has its effect, and ought not to be neglected; but if an improper attention be paid to it, the case is quite altered; then, observation may be attracted, and admiration won, but affection will not be secured. A husband soon becomes disgusted with the vanity and extravagance of a wife, who adorns herself with apparel, which does not properly belong to her station in life. Some people have thought, that because St. Peter mentions plaiting the hair, and wearing of gold, that therefore these things are in themselves wrong; but this is a misunderstanding of the real nature of his advice. The Apostle did not mean to explain to us how we ought to dress our hair, or what ornaments we might put on; but he wishes us to feel, that all love for such things is sinful. We are not to make our personal appearance an object of undue importance. We are to give our time and thoughts to something which is really far more valuable, and that is, the inward dis-

position of the heart. If great pains have been taken all through life to adorn the body, what will it avail when that body becomes a mass of corruption in the grave? Vanity of vanities, we may then say, all is vanity. But if we take great pains to adorn our minds with all holy and heavenly dispositions, we shall find that this makes us far more loveable in the eyes of our fellow-men, as well as being pleasing in the sight of God; and the value of such exertions will not cease to be felt even after our body has turned to dust, for the soul is immortal, and its ornaments will endure for ever. In urging upon men and women the performance of their relative duties, St. Peter reminds them of this fact, that they are heirs together of the grace of life. And oh! how much is it to be desired that this happy thought should be kept in mind, and acted up to. Those who live together on earth, whether bound by the ties of marriage, or any other connexion, should surely strive so to live together in love, and in the performance of those duties, which our several conditions in life require, that we may be fitted to live together for ever in heaven. We are now all heirs together of the same glory, which the grace of God offers to us. We are heirs, but shall we inherit? That is the question. It is indeed an awful thing to think of the sad separations which will one day take place among those who have been members of the same family, and have travelled more or less of the journey of life together. If we have in us a spark of right feeling, it must be very painful to think of being separated for ever from any one who has formed part of our domestic circle. Husbands and

wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, masters and servants, should all think of this. We are now all heirs together of the grace of life, and how could we bear to be parted, much less could we bear to think of being all miserable together. But there is still one other reason given, why those who dwell together should endeavour to fulfil their several duties, namely, this, that their prayers be not hindered. Is it to be supposed, that when those who ought to love and cherish one another, wrangle and dispute, they can kneel down and offer an acceptable service of prayer and praise to God, with tempers irritated, and spirits vexed and harassed? People little think how much the power to enter profitably into acts of worship depends upon wearing the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. And those who think it enough if they can command their own tempers, while yet they vex and worry the spirit of another, who may be the weaker vessel, may perhaps one day find that the efficacy of their prayers was hindered more by the one who caused the irritation, than by the one who felt it. It is in the exercise of self-control and self-denial, and in fostering a spirit of love, that we acquire a proper frame of mind for offering to God the sacrifice of prayer and praise, acceptable through Jesus Christ.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 8 to 16.—Having exhorted married people to the exercise of submission on the one side, and tenderness on the other, as necessary for securing mutual love and harmony, St. Peter proceeds to give

more general directions. He says, (8) In short, I wish you all to take a mutual interest in each other's concerns; to feel compassion one for another, to live together as brethren, and to be obliging and kind in your behaviour. (9) Not doing evil for evil, or returning bitter words with bitter words; but, on the contrary, to be always ready with a blessing, knowing that this is what your Christian profession requires of you; and that, in so doing, you may expect a blessing from God in return: as we learn from the thirty-fourth Psalm, which tells us, (10) that any one who wishes to prolong life and to be happy, must watch that his tongue does not speak evil, nor his lips utter deceit. (11) He must avoid what is evil, and practise what is good; he must strive to live in peace, and ever labour after it. (12) For the Lord carefully watches over those who strive to live a godly life; while those who do evil lie under His displeasure. (13) Besides this, if you live a quiet and peaceable life, you will be less likely to be injured by others; for who would harm you, if you thus do what is right and good? (14) Or if, on the contrary, you should be persecuted for righteousness' sake, as is sometimes the case, then remember that our Lord Himself has pronounced you happy (see Mat. v. 10), and be not dismayed by the threatenings of your enemies. (15) Only be careful to have God in your hearts, by placing your confidence in Him; and be sure that you understand aright the foundation on which your hopes are built, so that when required at any time to give a statement of the grounds of your religious hopes, you may be able, with modest diffidence to do so satisfactorily. (16) And be sure you have

a clear conscience, so that if people speak of you maliciously, as being guilty of improper conduct, they may hereafter be ashamed of having falsely accused you.

APPLICATION.

The best way to secure happiness.

The desire of happiness is one of the most universal of all feelings in the human breast, and yet very few people go the right way to secure it. St. Peter here points out what that way is, but it is a way not inviting to the natural man. It does not seem sufficiently direct for his purpose; and yet a round-about way will sometimes bring us more surely to a desired object, than one which appears to go straight for it. Though the happiness we seek may seem to be best secured by an unrestrained indulgence of every selfish desire, yet if, in obedience to the Word of God, we follow the Apostle's rule, we shall certainly find ourselves the gainers by it. He tells us that, instead of thinking so much about ourselves, and our own interests, we must feel a concern for the happiness of others, and carefully labour, by civility of manner, and tenderness of behaviour, to promote it. Therefore, self-love must not have the upper hand, for no one who thinks a great deal about himself will ever be very compassionate towards others. Those who are afflicted, we might expect, would feel tenderly for their fellow-sufferers; but

how many are so occupied with their own ills, as to have little or no pity to bestow on the sorrows and sufferings of other people. Again, the selfish person who is always thinking of his own honour, and his own rights, is not very ready with his blessing on those who have behaved ill to him. It is in no case an easy matter to speak kind and gentle words in reply to those who rail at us; and yet such is the temper of mind and spirit we must labour after, if we wish to live a happy life, and to see good days. The Psalmist and the Apostle both tell us this, and they both wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, so we are sure it is true; and those who are wise will try thus to be followers of that which is good. St. Peter gives two reasons why such a course as he recommends should prosper. In the first place, because it is the most likely way to disarm our enemies, and to secure the love of our friends; and in the second place, because it will certainly procure for us the favour and protection of Almighty God. He whose eyes are everywhere, and who knows every thought of every heart, looks with pleasure on the ways of the righteous, and is ever ready to hear their cry. His power is *Almighty* power, and it is engaged for them, and not against them; while, on the contrary, it is altogether against those who do evil, and will be exerted to punish them, if they do not repent. With reference to this life only, it is therefore, for the most part, true, that those fare the best who are the least selfish, and the most careful to promote the happiness of others. But cases do occur in which, as in the times of the early Christians, people are ill-treated on the very account of their

superior goodness. But this, though a great trial of faith, is really no loss; but will be more than made amends for in the end. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who certainly knows what blessedness means, says, “Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” But we must watch carefully against self-deception in this matter, for many people talk about their sufferings for righteousness’ sake, when in fact it is their want of righteousness, and not their having so much, that is the cause of all their trouble. In order that our sufferings may really be blessed to us, two things are necessary. In the first place, conscience, which is the voice of God within us, must clearly testify that those who speak evil of us, do so falsely; and in the next place, we must rightly understand the grounds on which we build our hope of God’s favour and protection. It is easy enough to say, My hope is in God: I know that God is on my side, and so forth: which is what many do say, who certainly, if required, could give no good reason for the hope they thus boldly express. Such language too often springs more from a self-justifying spirit, than from a wish to sanctify the Lord God, by a proper appeal to Him, whose eyes are in every place beholding the evil and the good. But certainly God does look with favour upon the righteous, that is, upon those who are sincerely endeavouring to do the thing that is right; trusting in Christ alone for needful help and strength. Although it is not necessary, or desirable, to be continually talking of our religious consolations, it is very necessary that we should be able to give a reason of the hope that we possess. And yet this,

alas! is what many could not do. Every body can say, I hope that God is on my side; but very many, if asked why they hope so, could not tell; and that, because they have never put the question to themselves. But surely it is not wise to live in ignorance, whether God be for us or against us. It is not safe to be thus trifling with the great purpose of our existence here on earth. We ought to be able to speak of our repentance towards God, of our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and of our sincere desire and endeavour to lead a holy life, in such a manner as might warrant our hope, that the favour and blessing of God does rest upon us. But observe, whenever we do show the grounds of our confidence and joy, it must be done with great meekness and fear; fear, lest we should be tempted to make a boast of what God has done for our souls. If we really have God on our side, and can speak with truth of the comfort which He bestows, we may well rejoice; for happy are we; but we must be careful always to speak with humility, and with a lowly thankfulness of mind.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 17 to 22.—St. Peter is showing how we may best pass through this world of trouble. He does not deny that troubles will come; but he says, (17) If it be God's will that you are to suffer from persecution, surely it is better to do so for your good deeds, than for your evil deeds. And to such suffering you will the more readily submit, if you consider

(18) how Jesus Christ suffered for our sins. He, the just, endured the punishment due to us, the unjust, in order that He might bring us once more into favour with God. In His human nature He suffered death; but by the Divine Spirit He was raised again. (19) By that same Spirit, also, He preached before the flood to those rebellious people, whose souls are now in safe keeping, awaiting the judgment-day, (20) who were disobedient to God, notwithstanding His patient forbearance for 120 years, while Noah was building the ark, in which few, that is, only eight souls, were saved, by floating on those waters which destroyed all the rest. (21) And herein we have a figure, or representation, of the manner in which baptism now saves us; by baptism, I do not mean the mere outward form of the sacrament, in which, by the washing of water, the body may be cleansed; but I mean the sacrament accompanied with a conscience, which can answer to God for the sincerity of purpose, with which it is received. Such baptism as this saves, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, (22) who is gone into heaven to share the throne of God, and rule with power over Angels, and all created beings.

APPLICATION.

In what way it is that baptism now saves.

Let us but duly reflect on the sufferings of Christ for us, and we never can complain of our sufferings,

be they what they may. When people repine and fret under what they call undeserved treatment, it arises from having no just views of the real desert of sin. They have not considered what their portion would have been, had not our blessed Saviour been willing to suffer undeservedly for them. Nothing which God permits us to suffer from others can ever amount to the just punishment which our sins deserve. People may fancy they fret not against God, but man; but then they forget that man is but an agent in God's hands. An unkin word cannot be spoken without His permission. It is from Him, as the great Governor of all things, that every trouble comes, and He allows it as a trial of our humility, patience, and resignation to His will; and to Him we must give an account of every angry fretful feeling excited in us by those who do us wrong. From speaking of human suffering the Apostle is led to speak of the sufferings of Christ, and having mentioned His death in the flesh, and His resurrection by the Spirit, He observes, that in His divine and spiritual nature, Jesus Christ had exercised mercy even to those who lived before the flood. By His Spirit He strove to convince and convert those unhappy beings, even as now He strives with us, and too often, alas, with no better success! But woe be to us if we, like them, continue unto the end disobedient to the warnings of our long-suffering God. St. Peter tells us, that if we are what we profess to be by our baptism, then, like Noah, we are saved. But the sign of water, used in baptism, must be accompanied by the thing signified, namely, the purifying of the soul from sin, or it will not profit. If we

are born of water and the Spirit also, then that sacrament is to us, what the ark was of old to Noah and his family: it carries us safe over all the waves of this troublesome world, and we shall be landed happily at last upon Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. But mark this: baptism does not save all, who by it receive the Christian name, else in this land none would be lost. St. Peter is very careful to tell us, that, in speaking of the baptism which does now save us, he does not mean the mere form, but the form accompanied by its proper fruits. Water alone could only cleanse the body, but what is wanted is a clean heart. But, perhaps, it may be asked, how a good conscience can accompany infant baptism. To which it may be observed, that possibly St. Peter was alluding to those who had been admitted to the privileges of Christ's religion when of riper years. But, in fact, it makes little difference, because in either case we are saved or not, according as we are, or are not, sincere in our endeavours to fulfil the engagement entered into at baptism, whether by ourselves, or by our sponsors for us. Baptism is the appointed means of our becoming members of Christ's body, the Church; and since without a union with Christ we cannot be saved, therefore it may well be said that baptism saves us. It is like the door by which we enter the ark; and if we never enter, that is, if we are never united to Christ, of course we perish, as did all those who were outside the ark. But, then, baptism is an agreement which, to be of any use, must be kept. It is a covenant, whereby God agrees to save those, and only those, who renounce the service of the devil, the world, and the

flesh, and who become the faithful servants and soldiers of Christ. Now, Reader, can you, with a good conscience, say, that you have closed with, and kept, the terms of this agreement? If so, if you are indeed acting up to the spirit of that most sacred service, by which you became a Christian, then happy are you; for so baptism doth save. But observe, if with the name of Christian we are still serving the world, and not Christ, our baptism, instead of saving, will rise up in judgment and condemn us, for having rebelled against the tender mercies of God, who had thus placed us in the way of salvation.

PRAYER.

O Lord God, I humbly beseech Thee, enable me to show forth the power of true religion in my life and conversation, so that my example may help to win others over to Thy blessed service. O Lord, I earnestly pray that the inner man in me may daily be cleansed and purified more and more. I pray for the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in Thy sight of great price. Enable me to follow the example of those holy women who, in the old time, adorned their religious profession by putting their trust in Thee, and patiently submitting themselves to those in authority over them. Lord, help me to perform aright every relative duty, and especially to exercise patience, and tender love towards those with whom I live, always remembering that we are heirs together of the grace of life. Suffer us not, by any want of mutual forbearance and kindness, to hinder the efficacy of our prayers. Give us all a

sincere wish to be of one mind. Teach us to have compassion one of another; to love as brethren; to be pitiful, and to be courteous, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing, that so we may inherit a blessing. Lord, help me at all times to refrain my tongue from evil, and my lips from speaking guile. Assist me to avoid all manner of evil, and to do all the good that I can, by all means seeking to pursue the course, which shall best promote the cause of peace. Lord, I desire to thank Thee for the blessed assurance that Thine eyes are over the righteous, and Thine ears open unto their prayers. And grant that those who do evil may learn, before it be too late, to tremble at the thought that Thou, Lord, art against them. If at any time I should be called to suffer for righteousness' sake, enable me to count it all joy. Enable me to sanctify Thee, O Lord God, in my heart; and to give, to all who may require it, a reason for the hope that is in me, with humility and thankfulness. Lord, grant me the blessing of a good conscience. If it be Thy will that I should suffer for well-doing, make me thankful that it is not for evil-doing; and enable me to bear in mind that Christ also suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to Thee. O Lord, I do earnestly desire to be always under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, so as to have the comfortable assurance, that the baptism wherewith I am baptised is that which does save, through faith in my blessed Saviour, who ever liveth at Thy right hand, to plead my cause; to whom, with Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER IV.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 1 to 7.—In the last chapter St. Peter had said that Jesus Christ suffered for sin, the just for the unjust; from which observation he draws the following practical remark: (1) Seeing then, he says, that Christ in His human nature has endured such sufferings for us, it is most important that you, who have much to suffer in your conflict with sin, should labour to acquire something of that same spirit of meek and patient endurance, which He exercised; for it is only after much suffering that a man gains the mastery over sin, (2) and is thus enabled to live the remainder of his life, not in subjection to the lusts of the flesh, but according to the will of God. (3) And surely the time which passed before our conversion was enough to have spent in living according to the way of the Gentiles, when we committed all sorts of dreadful sins. (4) But those who are still unconverted wonder that you do not go on practising the same excesses, and they are vexed and angry with you for not doing so, and say many unjust things concerning you; (5) but they will shortly have to give an account of their conduct to Him, who is prepared to judge all men, both those who shall be found alive at His coming, and those who shall have previously died. (6) For it was with reference to the final judgment, that the Gospel was

preached to those Christians who are now dead. While they were in the flesh, they were judged by men to be most unwise ; and they suffered death like other men, and in many cases a violent death ; but still, as they served God with their spirits, according to His will, their reward in the end is sure. (7) And mark this : The end of all earthly things, as far as we are concerned, cannot be far distant ; therefore, take a just and sober view of the real value of this passing world, and, by prayer and watchfulness, prepare for judgment.

APPLICATION.

That the Christian's course is painful, but the end glorious.

Those who take their ideas of what a Christian ought to be from the Bible, will not consider it so easy a thing to be really religious, as many seem to think. In this passage of Scripture we are called upon, if we would follow Christ, and be saved by Him, to prepare for suffering. We are told to arm ourselves with that which will render us capable of endurance. Happily for us, we are not doomed to suffer what is due to our sins. That would be eternal suffering. But though Christ has offered for us an all-sufficient atonement, we cannot be saved without a deliverance from the power of sin. To effect this we must exert ourselves. All will not be done for us ; though help sufficient will never be denied to those who earnestly seek for it. Now, no one ever heartily tried to overcome every sinful pro-

pensity, and to live altogether according to the will of God, but found that there is much suffering in such a work. The very act of denying to self the gratification which the flesh desires, is painful, so painful, that, alas! in many cases, people will not arm themselves with courage enough to endure it. Different people have different trials; and that which may seem as nothing to one person, may be heavy indeed to another. Those who are not under the temptation may wonder how a man can risk his health in this world, and his soul in the next, for such a gratification as that of drinking. And yet this indulgence can seldom be resisted when it has become a habit, excepting by those who take the Apostle's advice, and arm themselves with the mind of Christ. And what may appear still more strange, even in such a small matter as that of taking snuff, some men, though told that death would be the consequence, have still refused to deny themselves this gratification. Oh, what a fearful thing for a man to be thus a slave to his carnal lusts! Surely we had need buckle on our armour, when we see how easily the flesh may get the mastery over us, and lead us captive to our ruin. When people talk of wishing to be religious, they should sit down and count the cost; and, alas! many will find that it costs more than they are inclined to pay. And yet, is there not an eternity of suffering in store for those who will not suffer here? No doubt, people flatter themselves that they may indulge in little things now, and yet not suffer for their indulgence hereafter. But mark this: the man who will not suffer in the flesh has not ceased from sin; because he chooses to gratify his

desires, although he cannot in his conscience say, that in doing so, he thinks he is acting according to the will of God. And this is sin. Self-indulgence is so common, that the generality of people have no idea how completely it is at variance with the religion of Jesus. Our Lord was Himself a man of sorrows, and He has called us, if we will follow Him, to take up our cross daily. Yes, we are continually required to do violence to our selfish inclinations, if we would be real Christians. Our own will must not be consulted, but generally denied, if we would live according to the will of God; for it is His will, that we should bring our bodies under perfect subjection; so that indolence, and all unprofitable indulgence, must be resisted, however painful. And it is His will, also, that we should live for the good of others, and not for ourselves. We shall shortly have to give an account to Him, who is ready to judge the quick and dead, of how we have spent our time, how we have employed our money, and how we have exerted the influence we possess for the good of others. If we remember this, we shall certainly find great need to arm ourselves with that same mind, which enabled Jesus Christ to do and suffer all things with meekness and patient endurance. But then, if we thus regard life as a state of trial, in which our only anxiety is so to act as to obtain hereafter perfect happiness, we shall rejoice, rather than grieve, to think that “the end of all things is at hand,” which to some people is a very fearful consideration. The “all things” which come to an end are the things of this world, on which depends the whole happiness of such as live to please themselves, while they are the only things which can cause sor-

row or suffering to the Christian. May God give us grace to choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season !

EXPLANATION.

Verse 8 to 11.—In exhorting his Christian brethren to walk worthy of their high and holy calling, St. Peter says, (8) Above all things, let me beseech you to cultivate the spirit of love ; for love is indeed most essential, because it enables us to overlook a vast amount of those faults and infirmities, which we meet with in our fellow-creatures. (9) Be hospitable, and kind one towards another, without thinking it troublesome ; (10) and according as you have received the ability to be useful, so let each one exercise that ability for the good of all, looking upon yourselves as stewards, who must be faithful to God in the employment of His gifts. (11) If any man undertakes to instruct others, let him be careful that his instructions be according to the will of God, as revealed in the Scriptures. And in whatever way any of you minister to the wants, spiritual or temporal, of others, do so to the utmost of that power which is given to you of God, in order that God may be abundantly glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion, for ever and ever.

APPLICATION.

That good works are valuable only as tokens of our love and gratitude.

It is no uncommon thing to hear people most fearfully misapply these words of St. Peter, "Charity shall cover the multitude of sins." They suppose them to mean, that by acts of charity God may be induced to overlook our sins. This would, indeed, be a most comfortable doctrine for the rich, who might then buy with money the pardon of their sins; but it is altogether a false notion, contradicted by the whole of Scripture, which plainly tells us, that by the death of Christ, and for His merits' sake alone, our sins can be forgiven. It is plain to common sense, that if acts of charity could cover sin in the sight of God, the precious blood of Christ was shed in vain. Little do people know of the hatefulness of sin, who think of blotting it out by deeds of charity. As well might a man, heavily in debt, expect to satisfy his creditors by giving some trifling present to his children. No; it costs more to redeem a soul from the punishment due to sin than we have to pay, so we must let that alone for ever. The real meaning of the text is simply this: that charity, which is another word for love, makes people in a measure blind to the faults of others; it creates a disposition to think well of people, and a willingness to throw a veil over their sins, instead of taking pleasure in talking about them. But observe, although our sins can never be blotted out by the exercise of charity,

yet charity always dwells in the heart of those who know that their sins are forgiven for Jesus's sake. They naturally feel an earnest desire to show their love to God, by love exercised towards their fellow-creatures; just as we may suppose a man, who had had large debts forgiven him would gladly prove his gratitude by any little kindness he could show to the children of his benefactor. In fact, the value of charity, and all other good works, depends simply and altogether upon the motives from which they spring. There are two motives, which ought to operate in producing them: 1st, The desire of doing everything we possibly can to show our gratitude to Him, who died to procure for us the salvation of our souls; and 2nd, The feeling that all we possess is not our own, but belongs to God. We are but stewards, who must render a full account of the use we have made of all His grace and goodness. To every one of us is given the means of some usefulness, and we are bound to improve to the utmost the abilities we possess. Let it, then, be well observed, that if we do not, by our best exertions, labour to promote the glory of God, we shall be punished for our negligence. At the same time, by our utmost exertions we never can merit the pardon of sin.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 12 to 19.—St. Peter, knowing that the Christians to whom he wrote would be most severely tried by bitter persecution, endeavours to prepare them for it; he says, (12) My beloved brethren, when

those fierce trials come, which will prove the strength and purity of your faith, even as fire tries the metals to which it is applied, do not think it a strange or hard thing, that you should thus be exposed to suffering; (13) but rather be glad that you are permitted, in some measure, to share the sufferings of Christ, in order that when He shall appear in glory, you may be able to rejoice with Him, with exceeding great joy. (14) If you are reproached for your religion, because you bear the name of Christ, it is a happy thing, for you have God's glorious Spirit upholding and comforting you; and though your enemies may speak evil of that holy name, yet by your patient conduct Christ is glorified. (15) But may none of you ever suffer justly for your sins, for murder, or theft, or any evil doings. (16) It is only if a man suffer for being a Christian, that he has no need to be ashamed. In that case, let him thank God for it. (17) Because the time is come, when men must be tried and proved. These trials will, in the first place, deeply affect the people of God. But if the beginning is sad with us, what will the end be with those who reject the Gospel of God? (18) If the righteous cannot be saved without passing through so much suffering, how dreadful must be the fate of those who continue to be sinners against God. (19) Therefore, let those who suffer, in submission to the will of God, hold on their way uprightly and courageously; confident that their souls are safe in the keeping of a merciful and faithful Creator.

APPLICATION.

That afflictions should be regarded as means for preparing the soul
for heaven.

The times are changed since the days of St. Peter. Persecution no longer rages against the people of God, but the nature of Christ's religion is not changed. It requires that our faith should be tried, and our hearts purified. Therefore, in some shape or other, those who are the followers of Jesus Christ must expect affliction. And it will be well to allow the mind often to reflect on this subject, lest, when heavy trials come, we should think some strange thing had happened unto us, and begin to doubt whether such afflictions are not a proof that God has forsaken us. Many, under trials a thousand times less severe than those of the early Christians, have sunk into despondency, and said, "Surely, if the favour of God were with me, I should not thus be left to mourn." It is quite extraordinary that, after all which is said in Scripture about affliction being no mark of anger, but, on the contrary, a token of God's love, people should still torment themselves with this idea; and though told not to think it strange, however bitterly they may be tried, still they will think it strange. But if the times are changed in that we no longer suffer for the name of Christ, must we not also say, that the times are changed as regards the patience and faith exercised under such trials as do exist? Trifling, we must

allow, are our vexations and sorrows, in comparison with those of the early Christians, and yet they are oftentimes too much for our faith and patience. Religion does not seem to be that real thing in our hearts, which it was in the hearts of them, to whom St. Peter wrote. There is, alas! among us such great lukewarmness. By the generality of people the name of Christ is not evil spoken of, neither yet is He glorified. And this is a fearful state of things. We know from the third of Revelations, 15th and 16th verses, that there is nothing more hateful to God than a lukewarm spirit. "I would," He says, "thou wert cold or hot; so then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Now, observe these solemn words: "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" By the word "scarcely" we must understand, that it is with difficulty; it is with great exertion; it is after strong conflicts, and with bitter trials, that the righteous are saved. Now, if we are so lukewarm in our religion as to know nothing of the battle with sin, if we have never felt the conflict which those endure who are striving for the mastery over every evil propensity, what shall the end be? We know that if we are not counted among the righteous, we must be among the ungodly and the sinners. There is nothing between these two extremes; and this is an awful thought! Oh! let us dwell upon it, and pray heartily to God to strengthen our faith in unseen things. Then we shall be willing to suffer any affliction, by which we may be purified in heart, and fitted for heaven, and thankful for trouble, rather than that we should be

allowed to live on quietly in the enjoyment of present ease and comfort, shortly to end in everlasting misery.

PRAYER.

O Lord God, I earnestly beseech Thee to strengthen me by Thy grace for the conflict with sin, which ought to be the great business of my life. Grant that I may be armed with the mind of Christ, so that, remembering how He suffered to deliver me from the curse of sin, I may be willing to endure any suffering, in order to be delivered from its power. O Lord, I confess that the time past of my life has been spent too much according to the lusts of men; help me now to walk, in all things, according to Thy will, O God. Impress so strongly on my mind the vanity of all earthly pleasures, that I may care little for the opinion of those who may count my conduct strange, for not indulging in them. Help me to keep in mind the account which all must render unto Thee, who art ready to judge the quick and dead. Enable me to reflect without dismay upon the awful truth, that the end of all things is at hand. May I be sober, and watch unto prayer. Above all things, give me a heart full of fervent charity towards all mankind. Teach me to use hospitality without grudging; and, out of the abundance of Thy good gifts to me, make me ready, according as I am able, to minister to the wants of others. Make me feel that I am but a steward, who must one day render up an account of all which I now possess. Teach me to use aright whatever abilities Thou hast given

me for the instructing of others. My earnest prayer is, that in all things Thou mayest be glorified in me, through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion, for ever and ever. O Lord God, if it should please Thee to bring me into heavy trouble, strengthen my mind to endure it with patience, not regarding it as some strange thing, but as a cause of rejoicing, inasmuch as I may hope that, by partaking of Christ's sufferings now, I may be able hereafter, when His glory shall be revealed, to be glad also with exceeding joy. Grant that my sufferings may never be caused by my evil-doings; but if, for Christ's sake, I am reproached and spoken against, help me therein to count myself happy; and do Thou mercifully arouse the ungodly to consider what their end must be, if they obey not the Gospel. Into Thy hands, O God, I commit the keeping of my soul, as unto a faithful Creator; beseeching Thee to hear and answer these my imperfect prayers, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

CHAPTER V.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 1 to 4.—This letter of St. Peter's is addressed to the Christians who were scattered about in different parts of Asia, but still in sufficient numbers to be formed into congregations, having their appointed pastors; and to these he gives, in this

concluding chapter, a few words of advice; he says, (1) Let the ministers who are among you receive from me a word of exhortation, for I also am a minister, and having seen the sufferings of Christ, am appointed to bear witness to the same, and am even now a partaker, through faith, of the glory which hereafter shall be revealed. (2) Therefore, I say unto you, ministers, be diligent in the work you have to do, which is, to nourish the souls of Christ's people, by preaching to them the pure doctrines of the Gospel; and do not take upon yourselves this important charge as a matter of necessity, but regard it as a high privilege; and not for the sake of any worldly interest, but from really taking pleasure in the work; (3) and never consider yourselves as set up to be lords over your fellow-christians, but as called upon to set them, in your conduct, a high and holy example. (4) Then when Christ, who is the Chief Shepherd over all, shall again appear, you will receive a crown of glory, to endure for ever and ever.

APPLICATION.

That we should pray for our ministers.

No doubt the lesson which is to be learned from these verses principally concerns ministers; nevertheless the subject is one of very great importance to us all; for we are every one of us deeply interested in whatever concerns the welfare of our spiritual teachers. Those, therefore, who are not ministers,

cannot do better than turn the subject of these verses into prayer. We are all bound to pray for one another, but when we pray for our own minister, we do, in fact, pray for ourselves; for our prayer ought to be, that he may have grace from God to set before us, with truth and power, those blessed doctrines of the Gospel, on which our minds must feed, or our souls will not be properly nourished. Moreover, we ought to pray for him that, being called to so great an honour, he may be preserved from the peculiar danger of his high position; and that he may be enabled to enforce, by example as well as by preaching, the humbling and purifying nature of Christ's religion. Now, instead of performing this, our own duty, of praying in secret for those who are set over us, as our teachers, are we not inclined rather to join in the very common practice of finding fault with them? It is certainly much easier, and more agreeable to our natural hearts, to talk, with indignation, about priestly pride, and to make bitter remarks on the worldliness of those who ought to be examples to their flocks, than it is, in silence, to pray for them; and yet this would do good to both parties; while to bring railing accusations against Christ's ambassadors is really a fearful sin. And now let us turn to another subject, which is of general interest to all; let us remark on the account which St. Peter gives of himself, that we may learn something of the power of faith. At the time he wrote this letter, he was labouring, in the midst of bitter opposition, to spread the knowledge of Christ. In every sense of the word he was a follower of Him who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with

grief; for, in the bodily sufferings of Christ which he had witnessed, he also shared. He was persecuted even unto death, and ended his life upon the cross; yet he says nothing of his own trials, but describes himself as a witness of what Christ had suffered, and himself "a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." By faith he was enabled to speak as if he were then actually sharing, not his Master's sufferings, but his Master's glory. This is, indeed, a most striking proof of how completely faith is the substance of things hoped for. Can we then do better than pray continually, "Lord, increase my faith"? However we may be surrounded by the troubles and sorrows of this mortal life, if we have only like precious faith with this holy Apostle, we shall be able to look beyond them all, and count ourselves as partakers of the glory which shall one day be revealed. When the chief Shepherd shall appear, it will not be to reward only His under shepherds, but also His sheep. This is, indeed, a most joyous prospect to those, who can rejoice at all at the thought of Christ's appearing; and we may know pretty well how matters stand with our souls, by simply inquiring how we feel affected when, at any time, our attention is directed to these solemn words, "when the chief Shepherd shall appear." Are they to us pleasant words? Do we like to dwell upon them? Do they convey to the mind a very happy thought? No doubt they are awful words enough to some, but not to the true sheep of Christ, who are described in the tenth chapter of St. John, as they who know His voice, and follow Him. Oh! Reader, if you are now listening to the

voice of Christ in His written Word, and following Him in all watchfulness and humility, with faith and hope, no doubt but you will one day hear His voice calling upon you to receive a crown of glory, which fadeth not away.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 5 to 9.—St. Peter is addressing ministers, whom he calls elders, but as there were in those days, as in ours, different degrees of rank among the teachers, it was needful, for the good government of the church, that there should be subordination among them. Upon this head he adds a few words: (5) You, he says, who are in a lower kind of office, submit yourselves humbly to those who are above you. In fact, let all Christians be willing to submit themselves patiently to control, being clothed with humility; for God is opposed to the proud, but His blessing is with the humble. (6) Therefore, bow your proud spirits before the Almighty God, with great meekness and submission, in order that He may hereafter raise you up to honour and glory. (7) And at the same time, cast all your care upon God, for you may believe, most certainly, that He cares for you. (8) Furthermore, conduct yourselves with great sobriety in all things; and be well on your guard against temptation, for your great enemy, the devil, is very powerful; he may be compared to a lion roaring after prey, for he is always on the watch to catch and ruin immortal souls. (9) Your only way of resisting him is by stedfast faith in the power and love of Christ. And you must not be

discouraged by supposing that your trials are greater than those of other people ; for all your Christian brethren, throughout the world, have to contend with afflictions and trials equally great.

APPLICATION.

On the evil consequences of pride.

It is very evident from this, and many other passages of Scripture, that equality among men was not what God intended ; and though man, in his own fancied wisdom, has shown his folly by talking about it, and trying for it, nothing but disappointment has arisen from the attempt ; the thing is impossible ; there must be gradations among us, of various sorts and kinds. Experience, as well as Scripture, proves this ; and yet the love of power, and the unwillingness of mankind to be subject one to another, seems daily to increase. Liberty, instead of subjection, is all the cry. Whether in affairs of church or state, every one is for doing what is right in his own eyes ; and those who talk most of the duty of submission, in regard to those beneath them, are not the least rebellious, when they themselves ought to submit to the power above them. This being the case, we have especial need to be warned by such a passage as the one before us. Since rebellious pride is so peculiarly the character of the times in which we live, we ought to pause, and consider well these words : “ God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.” Though the lesson of submission is addressed, in the

first instance, to ministers, yet it is extended to all. And certainly we all need to watch and pray most earnestly for the spirit of humility. In whatever rank or position in life we may be placed, we ought seriously to consider whether we are really yielding ourselves humbly to the proper restraints of our position; or whether, from the fear of being trampled upon, and from a foolish notion of our own dignity, we are struggling to maintain our fancied rights. Not duty only, but our true happiness, demands our humble submission to God's disposal of us. Those who struggle against the position in which they are placed, wear themselves out, and gain nothing. They resemble a poor bird, beating itself to death against the wires of its cage, in vain desires for liberty. But even if, in resisting power, or in contending for it, they gain their end, still they will not really prosper, any more than the Jews did, who clamoured for flesh in the wilderness; for, though they were not disappointed of their lusts, still observe, "While the meat was yet in their mouths, the heavy wrath of God fell upon them, and slew the wealthiest of them." We may well say, who can fight against God, and prosper? If God resists them, what can men do? Sooner or later their pride must be humbled, and give place to shame. Besides, it ought to be observed, that when we give way to pride, we not only fight against God, but we take part with our great enemy the devil, who, in point of strength, is like a roaring lion, and who longs to seize upon us, and make us his own for ever. If, then, we tremble at the thought of dwelling with devils and damned spirits in hell, we must watch against pride; we must attend to the

admonition of St. Peter, "Be sober, be vigilant." Sobriety does not mean moderation only in drink, but moderation in everything; there is such a thing as being drunken with pride, and other evil passions. What makes the difference between a man when he is sober, and when he is drunk? It is, that in the one case he knows how to conduct himself, and in the other he does not. In like manner, when a man is filled up with pride he does all sorts of absurd things, at which thoughtless people laugh, and serious people grieve. And it is the same with regard to other feelings, when they take violent hold, the man governed by them is led into all sorts of sin and folly. To be really sober, therefore, it is necessary to keep all our feelings and affections under due control, lest they get the mastery over us; but to do this is a hard matter; still, if now we will but meekly submit to His humbling discipline, God will, in due time, greatly exalt us: all we want is faith; if we have but faith in God's Word, fully to believe His awful threatenings, and to rely on His precious promises, we shall be able to resist our adversary, however alluring his temptations may be, or however painful the trials and sorrows he may bring upon us.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 10 to 14.—The temptations and trials which beset the Christian's course are always heavy to bear, but they were especially so in the early times of Christianity. St. Peter, therefore, fearing lest those to whom he wrote should sink under their difficulties,

closes his letter with words of comfort and encouragement; he says, (10) God, who is full of mercy, and who, by His Son Jesus Christ, has opened to us the way to eternal glory, will, I sincerely trust, make your sufferings the means of your attaining to greater perfection; so that, your faith being exercised by them, you may be the more firmly established therein. (11) To Him be glory and honour, for ever and ever. (12) I send this letter to you by Silvanus, (whom I believe to be a most excellent Christian brother,) in which I have written you a short exhortation, and given you my testimony to the truth of God's grace, on which you so justly build all your hopes. (13) The people of God, living in Babylon, wish me to express their kindest feelings towards you, as does also my son Mark. (14) Give to each other a kiss of charity, and may love and peace ever reign among you, who are followers of Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION.

That God brings good out of evil, to His own glory.

No doubt it is frequently a subject of wonder to every reflecting mind, that God, whose power is infinite, should ever have permitted such an evil and bitter thing as sin to enter into His dominions; but while we must not pretend to understand all God's doings, we may rest assured of this, that He will make everything, in the end, to work for His own glory. And, ignorant as we are in many respects,

yet even now we may see that the evil which abounds among us does, in many ways, work for good, which we are bound to acknowledge, to the glory of God. When we read that Satan, who goes about like a roaring lion, stirred up wicked men to persecute the early Christians, our first thought naturally is, what a wonder that God permitted it. Nevertheless, we find that what was intended by Satan to drive them from their faith in Christ, proved, through the grace of God, to be the very means by which their faith was perfected; they were strengthened, established, and settled in it. And so also, unless we join with our enemy, we shall always find that he actually does us good, while seeking to destroy us. We know that Adam lost the happiness of Paradise by believing a lie; so we are called to be partakers of everlasting glory, by believing in the truth of the grace of God—that is to say, believing in His full, free, and undeserved love and mercy towards us. To make us doubt this is of course Satan's object, and God often permits him to try to do so with us, as with Job, by means of heavy afflictions, loss of friends, and their sad unkindness, loss of health, and loss of money; in fact, he makes life a burden, and then he knows that we shall find it hard, very hard, to believe that all this is permitted by a God of love; he hopes that we may, like Job's wife, be inclined to curse God, and die. But, as regards a real Christian, such trials and afflictions have a very different effect; they make him feel his own weakness and danger, and thereby he is driven upon his knees, and he prays with tenfold more earnestness than in the days of his prosperity. And when, in his greatest need,

he feels that the world has no comfort to offer, this leads him to go to the Bible for comfort; and, since all on earth has turned to bitterness, the hope of heaven, which before was faint, becomes all and everything to him, and Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, is therefore now most precious. Thus does evil work for good. Another plan by which Satan hopes to drive us from God, is by causing our religion to be laughed at. There is nothing more distressing than to be the object of scorn and ridicule. So unpleasant is it, that the mere dread of being remarked upon as extraordinary, has hindered some people from following a truly religious course, who, in other respects, had courage enough for anything. But see what good may arise even from this temptation, if we are determined to resist it. If our religious principles are the means of bringing upon us contempt and discomfort, we shall, of course, wish to be quite sure that we are right, and that we are not making ourselves miserable for nothing; we shall, therefore, search the Scriptures again and again, to see whether or not we have just grounds to believe that our conduct is such as God really requires of us; and thus the foundation of our hopes being examined, and found good, we shall only be the more firmly established in our faith and practice. Thus it is that trouble and sorrow, temptation and difficulty, though all bad in themselves, may be turned to good for us, and to the glory of God; for it is to the praise and glory of God that He can thus restrain the power of Satan, and make him serve a purpose exactly contrary to his own will. If, then, we are at any time heavily depressed, and

ready to say, through despondency, all things are against me, let us instantly check this repining and rebellious feeling, by remembering that nothing can really be against us, unless we are our own enemies. Our distresses and difficulties may be hard to bear, but after we have suffered a while in patience and faith, we shall find that all this has done us good; we shall find, by sweet experience, that God permitted it for the very purpose that He might perfect in us that which was necessary for our salvation; and that His only object was to strengthen, stablish, and settle us in that faith by which we are finally to be saved. Therefore, we may well join with the Apostle in saying, to Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever.

PRAYER.

O Lord God, I humbly desire to thank Thee for the example of patience and faith set before us by Thy holy Apostle Peter. Assist me in my earnest endeavours to follow in his steps. Teach me at all times so to remember the sufferings of Christ, that I may with patience bear my own trials, and that I may, through faith in Him, be enabled to count myself as a partaker in the glory which shall be revealed. O God, mercifully bestow upon me the privilege and blessing of attending upon a faithful minister. Grant that all who are called to the sacred office may be men of real piety, and seeking only Thy glory, and the good of immortal souls. Preserve them from the power of those temptations by which Satan strives to hinder their usefulness.

Suffer them not to be blinded by the love of power, or to be influenced by the love of riches, but enable them to set before their people the example of a truly humble and devoted life; and grant that, while feeding others, they may be fed also themselves with the abundant riches of Thy grace, that so when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ministers and people may alike rejoice together, and receive that crown of glory, which fadeth not away. O Lord God, Thou that resistest the proud, but givest grace unto the humble, mercifully clothe me with humility. Take from me that natural pride of heart which seeks to be exalted, instead of meekly submitting to the appointment of Thy sovereign will. Grant that, with patience and lowliness of mind, I may wait upon Thee, hoping in due time to be exalted to Thy heavenly kingdom. In all seasons of temptation and trial, teach me to cast my care on Thee, knowing that Thou, Lord, carest for me. Grant that I may be sober-minded, watching carefully against my bitter enemy, who, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour. O God of all grace, who hast called us unto eternal glory, by Christ Jesus, grant that after I have suffered awhile I may be perfectly stablished, strengthened, and settled in the true faith. To Thee, O Heavenly Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

SECOND EPISTLE GENERAL OF ST. PETER.

CHAPTER I.

VERSE 1 to 4.—St. Peter, in the beginning of this epistle, informs us who he is, and who they are to whom he writes; he says, (1) I, Simon Peter, am a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, and one of His twelve Apostles; I write this letter to all who, like us, have been taught the precious privilege of fixing their faith and confidence in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, (2) and may you whom we now address enjoy the favour of God, and every blessing, more and more, through a growing acquaintance with God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (3) For, in the exercise of His divine power, God has provided for us all things necessary to our growth in spiritual life and holiness, by bringing us to the knowledge of Himself; it being His desire that we should enjoy eternal happiness, and also obtain such holiness as is necessary to fit us for it. (4) Wherefore God has given to us exceeding great and precious promises, so great, that we, who have been delivered from the power of our corruptions, are encouraged to strive more and more

after that likeness to the Divine nature, which we do in some measure actually enjoy.

APPLICATION.

That it is by the knowledge of God that we grow in holiness.

That which is here set before us as the great object to be obtained, is a right knowledge of God, for it is described, not only as the foundation of all religion, but as the fountain from which all its streams of joy and comfort flow. We may flatter ourselves, perhaps, that we have the knowledge of God, but certainly we can know very little of Him, if we are satisfied with what we possess; those who have any true knowledge of God are always anxious to obtain more, much more. Ignorance of God is, in fact, the root of all evil; for in this passage of Scripture we are plainly told, that God, in the exercise of His Sovereign power, has seen fit to couple together these two things: holiness, and the knowledge of Himself. But we must observe the difference between head-knowledge and heart-knowledge. In words we may be able to say, that all our salvation depends upon the righteousness of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ; and yet, at the same time, know nothing of that precious faith by which His righteousness is applied to ourselves. We might easily learn a catechism by heart, which should teach us all the blessed truths of the Gospel; but such a knowledge as that would not give us all things which

pertain to life and godliness. Our Saviour, in the prayer He addressed to His Heavenly Father, speaks thus: "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." It is life eternal so to know God as to love Him, and to believe that we have in Him a reconciled Father, an all-sufficient Saviour, and an ever-present Comforter. Now then, Reader, do you know anything of God after this fashion? Have you felt that your faith in the righteousness of Christ is the most precious thing that you possess? that you would part with everything sooner than with that knowledge? If so, grace and peace will assuredly abound towards you. But rest not where you are; seek to know more of the gracious character of God, and to have that knowledge applied, with yet greater power, to your heart. It is by becoming daily more and more acquainted with the loving-kindness of the Lord, and finding our happiness in Him, that we shall grow in holiness; this is the way marked out by God. And observe what great things we are encouraged to hope from it, nothing short of being like God Himself. Such are the precious promises made to Christians, that nothing is too much to be expected. As the Psalmist says, He takes us from the dunghill, that He may set us among princes, for it is His will that we should be partakers of the Divine nature. But, oh! how sad it is to think that some people have no wish to be like God! They are sunk so low in sin that they really have no wish to be made partakers of the Divine nature; and, consequently, have no pleasure in reading this passage of Scripture, which is so peculiarly delightful to those

to whom it is addressed ; that is to say, to those who have obtained like precious faith with the Apostle Peter.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 5 to 14.—St. Peter had been speaking in a most encouraging manner of the precious promises made to Christians ; but now, lest this encouragement should lead to carelessness, he goes on to show what is needful on our parts, and says : (5) Besides all that which God is willing to do for you, it is necessary that you should, with the greatest diligence, take care that you add to your faith in God, a life of virtue, and, in order that your virtue may be consistent, seek earnestly to acquire true spiritual knowledge ; (6) such knowledge as will lead you to be temperate in your enjoyments, and patient in your afflictions ; in fact, you must diligently perform every duty towards God, (7) and show every sort of kindness towards your fellow-men. (8) If such be the manner of your life and conduct, then it will be very evident that your knowledge of Christ is not a barren speculation, but that it is that right sort of knowledge which brings forth good fruit. (9) But he that is wanting in these things, and yet hopes to be saved, has no spiritual light ; he is ignorant of the true nature of the Gospel, and has forgotten that the waters of baptism, by which his sins were washed out, can profit nothing, unless he continues to labour after purity and holiness throughout the whole of life. (10) Therefore I beseech you, brethren, to be most diligent in your exertions to make sure of profiting

by the grace of God, who has chosen you from among the rest of the world, to be called into the Gospel covenant ; and if you follow the rules which I have given you, you will not be suffered to fall ; (11) but will assuredly be admitted to the enjoyment of Christ's eternal kingdom in heaven. (12) And feeling so deeply the importance of these things, I, for my part, will not fail continually to remind you of them, though you know them, and for the present seem well established in the truth. (13) Yes, as long as I live, I shall always think it right to stir you up to exertion, by a warning voice, (14) for I know that soon I must lay down my life, in the manner foretold me by my Master, Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION.

That we must use great diligence to make our calling and election sure.

Some people are so dead to the interests of their souls, that, strange to say, they do not even make a pretence to religion. But the generality of people, to a certain degree, think they are religious, although, alas, it is very plain that they give no diligence to make their calling and election sure ; they are far more anxious about temporal than eternal things, and strive much harder to get a livelihood here on earth, than to be sure of living for ever in heaven. But whoever reads carefully the passage of Scripture before us, must see plainly, that to be religious to

any good purpose is no light matter. We may go to church, and take the sacrament, use a form of prayer; and so make a show of religion, easily enough; and the devil, the great enemy of souls, may whisper pleasant things, and say, Surely you do more for your soul than many people, and if you are lost what will become of thousands? This is a way of arguing which satisfies many people, but they forget that thousands, and tens of thousands, are going the road to destruction. Let us, then, beware how we deceive ourselves with a show of religious profession, or with mere head-knowledge of Gospel truth. What we want, and what we must have, to save our own souls, is a religion that tells upon our life and conduct. It must make us virtuous, it must make us laborious in seeking after knowledge, such knowledge as shall enable us to live to the glory of God, and the good of our fellow-creatures. Reader, is this your sort of religion? Can you say that it is the chief business of your life, to work out your soul's salvation? Do you really take pains to profit by your Christian calling? We all, in this happy land, are, in one sense of the word, the elect of God; that is to say, we are chosen by Him to be Christians, we have received a call; we are by our baptism made professed disciples, and servants of Christ; and, therefore, have been called to follow Him, and have promised, by our sureties, that we will do so. But, alas! alas! how very many forget all about these things, and in the midst of the Gospel light are so blind that they cannot see their own blessings. They have forgotten for what purpose they were purged from their old sins; that is to say, the sin

they inherit from their forefathers, for we are all born into the world sinners, because our fathers were sinners. We are born of an unholy race; being children of Adam we share the guilt and condemnation into which he fell upon eating the forbidden fruit, but at our baptism we are purged, that is, cleansed from these sins. And for what purpose has God been pleased to show us thus much of His favour? Was it that we might go and offend Him again, by a life of thoughtlessness and disrespect, perhaps by downright iniquity? No, clearly this could not have been His purpose; His merciful intention in calling and electing us was, as we learn in this chapter, that we might be blessed with both virtue and glory; in short, that we might be made partakers of the divine nature here on earth, and share the glories of His kingdom in heaven. And now let us endeavour to profit by the goodness of God, in His dealings with us, and to profit by what we have now read. St. Peter wished to stir up people, as long as he lived, to think of their souls, and now, though he has gone to rest, having put off his earthly tabernacle for more than 1800 years, still his words may and ought to stir us up also. Oh, that we might all be persuaded to give more earnest heed, than we have ever hitherto done, to the great business of making our calling and election sure. It will be dreadful, indeed, if we should just come short of getting to heaven. How shocking it must be to feel that, a little more exertion, a little more diligence, and we might have secured to ourselves an entrance into Christ's everlasting kingdom; but for the want of it, to find ourselves cast out for ever. Oh, may this never be the horrible reflection

of any one who reads this. No, God grant that we may all so earnestly strive after holiness, that an entrance may be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 15 to 21.—In the preceding verse the Apostle had alluded to his death, respecting the manner of which he had received some intimations from his blessed Master. He now goes on to say, (15) however, while I am still spared to you, it shall be my endeavour so to write, that after I am dead you may have a full and perfect remembrance of all those precious truths which I have taught you. (16) For, be well assured, that we have not deceived you with idle tales of our own contriving, when setting before you the doctrines of Christ's glorious Gospel, of whose awful majesty we had a most convincing proof, when we were eye-witnesses (17) of the honour conferred upon Him, by God the Father, on the mount of transfiguration, for out of a cloud of exceeding great glory there came such a voice, which said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (18) This voice, speaking out of heaven, we heard, when James, John, and I were with Him on the holy mountain. (19) But there is, besides this testimony, that which must be still more satisfactory to your minds, namely, the voice of prophecy, to which, as a light in a dark place, you will do well to turn your attention, for the entire confirmation of your faith. (20) And, observe this, no prophecy of Scripture is

to be considered as the production of any mere man ; (21) for the Prophets of old spake, not according to their own will, but, being holy men, they were employed by God to make known His will, under the influences of the Holy Ghost.

APPLICATION.

That those who can teach others must do it diligently, and that those who now sit in darkness must diligently seek for light.

Those who have themselves felt the truth and power of religion purifying and comforting their own souls, cannot but feel, like St. Peter, anxious to impart to others something of this most blessed knowledge ; and, as the hour of their departure out of this world draws near, of course this feeling would increase. But all people have not the warning given them, which the Apostle had, respecting their approaching death ; it comes very much unawares to many. Therefore, those who wish to impress Divine truth on the minds of others, must be careful to improve their opportunities while they last, not knowing how soon their season for labour may be forever closed. And, moreover, let it be remembered, that the advice which is now thought little of may, when they are dead and gone, be brought to remembrance with tenfold more effect. Here is a motive for great exertion, for no one knows how far the effects of their labours may extend. Little did St. Peter know the benefit his writings would confer through

every age. His immediate object in writing was that those to whom he had made known the power and coming of Jesus Christ might have his teaching in remembrance after he was gone. But now eighteen hundred years have rolled away, and still his labours continue to bless the world. Let us then be stirred up by this thought to the greatest diligence in warning and exhorting one another while life endures. But is it every one who can labour for the good of others? Alas, no. There are many who, as regards spiritual things, have no light or life in them, and can have, therefore, nothing to impart. Our first business, then, on reading this portion of Scripture, must be to inquire whether we ourselves know anything of the coming and power of Jesus Christ. Of course, if we call ourselves Christians, we acknowledge it as a truth that Christ did come once into this world to save it, and that He will come again a second time to judge it. But while we know thus much of the coming of Christ, what do we know of His power? Have we felt His Almighty power exercised on our hearts, so as to change and purify our natures? Without this, we know little of Christ; nothing, in short, to any purpose. But, Reader, if this should be your sad case, sit not down contented and resigned to your condition, without making an effort to improve it. Though you may not yet feel the power of Divine truth, you must seek after it by the study of God's Word, and prayer. If you are still in darkness, you must remember that there is now a light shining in a dark place, to which you are indeed bound to give heed; for if you do not, the end will be that you will go to that dreadful place,

where there is the blackness of darkness for ever. There no light shineth. Oh, beware of giving yourself up to the spirit of indifference, or the sad feelings of despair. If you confess to yourself that all is not right; that you are, in fact, not safe; be thankful that there is light enough within you to show you thus much. But beware, lest by carelessness, and the driving away of thought, you extinguish this little light. On the contrary, encourage serious thought as much as possible, and cheer yourself with the comfortable hope, that the present conviction of your sin and danger is the dawning light of a brighter day about to shine upon you. Only believe that God wishes you to be saved, and that He has provided the means; and then, if you will but be earnest in prayer for the teaching of the Holy Ghost, and study carefully that book which holy men of old wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, there is no reason to fear but that the day-star will arise in your heart, before which all darkness shall flee away, and sin and corruption have no more dominion over you. Then you will feel, like St. Peter, that, in seeking after the knowledge of Christ, you have followed no cunningly devised fable, but have found a great and glorious reality, which will make you full of peace on earth, and bring you to everlasting joy and happiness in the world to come.

PRAYER.

O Lord God, Heavenly Father, I humbly desire to approach Thee in an acceptable manner. I desire to trust only in the righteousness of my God and

Saviour Jesus Christ. Mercifully, for His sake, grant that I may obtain the precious gift of faith; and that Thy grace and peace may be multiplied unto me, by growing in the knowledge of Thee, and of Jesus Christ our Lord. I thank Thee, merciful God, for the exceeding great and precious promises contained in Thy holy Word, by which I am permitted to hope that I may be made a partaker of Thy Divine nature, and that I may escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. O Lord, increase my faith, and help me to labour with all diligence to bring forth the fruits of holiness, in the exercise of temperance, and patience, brotherly kindness, and charity. Take from me, O Lord, the blinding influence of sin. Make me to remember how entirely I am bound to the exercise of holiness, by my Christian profession. Stir me up to labour with all diligence to make my calling and election sure, that so an entrance may be ministered unto me abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Assist me in all my endeavours to awaken others to a concern for their souls, and to keep up among us a remembrance of holy things. Grant that my conduct and conversation may have a profitable influence on those among whom I live; and that the remembrance of me, when I am seen no more, may still be of use. I do earnestly pray that the knowledge of my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, may now come with such power into my heart, that, at His second coming in great glory, I may rejoice with exceeding joy. Assist me, with all humility and diligence, to study Thy holy Word, thankfully receiving it as the only true light which shineth in this

dark world. Grant that the Holy Spirit, which moved the hearts of those holy men, by whom it was written, may also guide my heart to a right understanding of it. Be pleased to grant these prayers, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

Verse 1 to 9.—In the last chapter St. Peter had been speaking of the duty of studying prophecy, from whence he goes on to say, (1) But there were formerly among the Jews persons pretending to prophecy, who had no commission from God; and, in like manner, you must expect that among you false teachers will arise, who will, in a sly, cautious manner, introduce religious doctrines of an erroneous and deadly nature; they will even go so far as to deny the divinity of that blessed Saviour, who gave Himself as a ransom for our souls; thus will they bring certain destruction upon themselves, and (2) many, alas! will be led astray by them, and the blessed Gospel will itself, in consequence, be evil spoken of. (3) From the love of money these false teachers will seek to make themselves agreeable by flattering words, and will not care if they ruin immortal souls, so they can but make a profitable bargain for themselves; and the heavy judgment which, in consequence, is about to fall upon them, will not linger long; their damnation is coming

quickly, (4) and this we may feel sure of, if we consider that God spared not the Angels who rebelled against Him in heaven, but cast them into hell, there to dwell in chains and darkness unto the great judgment-day. (5) And again, if we remember how God spared not the sinful inhabitants of the old world, (save only Noah, who was a preacher of righteousness, and his family) but destroyed all the ungodly upon earth, with a flood of waters; (6) also, how the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were burnt to ashes, as a warning to all who should afterwards live in an ungodly manner, (7) while Lot was saved, who had been continually vexed with hearing the shocking language of the wicked, and witnessing their vile conduct; (8) for that good man, while living among such sinners, had suffered greatly, by hearing and seeing so much of their wickedness. (9) Thus, then, we see that God knows how to deliver out of temptation those who really wish to live a godly life; while the unjust are only awaiting that day of judgment, in which they will finally be condemned.

APPLICATION.

That God will surely keep His word, whether of threatening or of promise.

Here is a warning for all those who, as St. Paul expresses it, have itching ears; that is to say, persons anxiously seeking after something new in religion, and desiring more to be amused than rightly

instructed. Such persons are but too well prepared to fall victims to the false teachers here foretold, of whom, alas ! there are now so many. Unless people attend to the Apostle's warning, and stand on their guard, how is it likely that they can escape being led into error. The enemy we have to fear is not an open one. None professedly teach heresy, that is to say, false doctrine. No, they privily bring in their damnable errors ; privily, that is, in a sly, under-hand way. With much cunning and cleverness they manage to draw people's minds away from the truth. Unless, therefore, we watch and pray carefully, we may even be led to deny the Lord that bought us, dreadful as such a thing may now appear. Depend upon it, this is the great end Satan has in view. He uses false teachers especially to draw us off from Christ, and, if he can succeed, he brings us to a swift destruction. Let us, then, especially guard against the teaching of those, who would divert our minds from that faith in Christ, by which alone we can be saved. But, besides being warned of our danger, in consequence of the many false teachers there are in the world, we are also taught by this portion of Scripture, the awful certainty that God will punish sinners. It is quite astonishing how much some people can deceive themselves on this point. We often hear those who are living in a most ungodly manner say, that they are not afraid to die, for they trust in the mercy of God. In spite of all His threatenings against sin, they still hope that vengeance will never fall upon the sinner ; they think that, when it comes to the point, a feeling of compassion will lead God to prove false to His word,

sooner than punish such immense numbers as have lived in the neglect of Him. They foolishly think that, because there are so very many quite as bad as themselves, therefore God will surely pardon them. But this is indeed a vain hope, nothing better than a straw for a drowning man to catch at. If God could be affected by numbers, would He have destroyed the whole world by water, with the exception of only eight persons? Does not this circumstance clearly prove that if all were now going along the broad road of sin, their end would be everlasting destruction? St. Peter clearly shows that God cannot be moved from His purpose, either by the high rank, or the great number of those who are to be punished. For observe: He spared not the Angels which sinned. He spared not the populous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; no, nor even the whole world, when all were corrupt. Why then should He spare us? Every righteous man who, like holy Lot, lives among the ungodly, in hearing and seeing what goes on, must have his righteous soul vexed from day to day. He cannot but be very unhappy to think of the thousands, and the tens of thousands, who, in spite of every warning, are going on headlong to destruction; nevertheless, if sinners will not change, we cannot, we must not hope, that God will change, for this is impossible. "God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" He certainly will make good His word. Sooner or later, all that is written in the Scriptures we shall find to be true, His promises, as well as His threatenings. Let, then, those

who feel the difficulty of living a really holy life among an unholy people, remember the blessed assurance here given, that the "Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." It is as fully His purpose to succour and support those who look to Him for help, as it is His intention finally to crush His enemies.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 10 to 17.—St. Peter was speaking of those false teachers, on whom the awful judgment of God is sure to fall, though for a time it may be delayed; and he now goes on to describe those, on whom the wrath of God will especially fall; he says, (10) they are such as choose to indulge the corrupt desires of their sinful flesh, and who, resisting all control, despise those who are placed over them as governors in the Church. They are so presumptuous, that they will listen to no advice; their own will is the only guide they choose to follow, and they are not even afraid of speaking evil of those who are placed in authority over them. (11) While Angels, who are so much more exalted in power and dignity than they are, never bring before God any bitter accusations. (12) But these men, who are no better than the beasts, which are intended for food, boldly speak evil of things they do not understand; and the end is, that they will be utterly destroyed. (13) They will receive the proper reward of that unrighteousness which can revel in wickedness, even in broad day. They are a terrible disgrace to their Christian profes-

sion, because, though they choose to indulge themselves in sinful pleasure, they still continue to join in your religious services. (14) Their very looks show the wickedness that is going on in their hearts; they cannot cease from the indulgence of sin, even for a time, and, alas! they are too successful in misleading other weak Christians. And, again, they have a heart so bent upon covetousness, that they are constantly contriving means for the accumulation of money. In fact, they are evidently under the curse of God; (15) for they have entirely forsaken the right way, and have followed the example of Balaam, who was willing to sell his soul for the worthless wealth of this world, (16) upon which occasion an ass was permitted to speak, that it might reprove the Prophet. (17) Such characters as these are like wells, wherein we expect to find water, but are disappointed; or like clouds that promise rain, but the wind drives them away; for them there is prepared a dreadful abode in the land of everlasting darkness.

APPLICATION.

That we should study Scripture, with a view to self-examination.

It may seem strange to us, that, even during the life-time of the Apostles, there should have been men, professing the Christian religion, of characters so bad as are here described; but it only shows how very evil is the heart of man; and it should convey to us this lesson, that no circumstances,

however favourable in themselves, can be relied upon for making us real Christians. On the contrary, favourable circumstances may only prove the means of great self-deception. It is much to be feared that many people mistake the means of grace, for grace itself; that is to say, they count themselves religious, merely because of their religious advantages; just as these bad men called themselves Christians, because they belonged to the company of true believers. And so in these days those who, by the providence of God, have been placed in a religious family, as children or servants, may very likely, on that account alone, suppose themselves to be religious; they have the daily benefit of family worship; they hear continually religious subjects conversed upon; and being thus in the society of the religious, and taking their stand among the people of God, they think that all is well. Alas! the case may be far different; without being so openly bad, as to make them spots and blemishes among their associates, without being downright hypocrites, they may still be wells without water; that is, bearing the appearance, without the reality of godliness; and if so, sooner or later, when the day of trial comes, their emptiness will appear, to the disappointment and grief of those who had hoped better things of them, and to their own utter confusion. There is something very shocking in being compared to a well without water. In hot countries where there is a great scarcity of water, we can easily imagine the delight with which travellers approach to a well; but what must their feelings be, if, when they come near, they find that there is no water in it. Oh, what a terrible disappointment!

However, the fainting traveller seeking water and finding none, can but imperfectly describe what our feelings must be, if, when we come to die, and want all the comfort of our religion, we find that it has all along been nothing but an empty profession. Reader, do you make a profession of religion? It is to be hoped you do; for if not, certainly nothing but a world of endless misery lies before you. But if you do think you are a religious person, then consider well what sort of fruit you are bringing forth. Self-examination is a most important duty, but to perform it well we must carefully study the holy Scriptures. The passage before us, if duly considered, may be one of great use. Of course we cannot suppose ourselves to be religious, if, with truth it could be said of us, "They walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness." In this case the subject admits of no doubt. But merely to be free from gross sin proves very little. Then let us seriously consider the next sentence, "and despise governments." Now does this apply to us? Do we resist authority, and kick against all restraint? Here is a subject for inquiry. Are we altogether free from presumption and self-will? Do we never allow ourselves to speak evil of those who are set in authority over us, instead of yielding them a willing submission? If we thus reflect closely on our characters, we may, perhaps, detect something of this root of evil in ourselves, although, on the first reading of the chapter, we might have been ready to say, I thank God I am not one of this sort. And as this spirit of insubordination is very common, we have need to be reminded how entirely it is opposed

to the meek humility which is the fruit of real godliness.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 18 to 22.—St. Peter is describing the character of hypocritical professors, and false teachers of religion, and says, (18) In their discourses they make use of very fine language, and many flattering arguments, to persuade men that they may safely indulge their fleshly desires, and thus they draw back again to the way of sin many of those who had escaped from the errors of idolatry. (19) They flatter them with the promise of liberty, by freeing them from what they call unnecessary strictness, but all the while they are themselves the slaves of sin and corruption; for, be it observed, a man is most assuredly in bondage, if he is so overcome by his lusts as not to be able to resist them. (20) And whoever has once escaped from the power of evil, through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but becomes again overpowered by it, that man's state is worse in the end than in the beginning. (21) For it is better never to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it to turn from it. (22) To such we may apply the proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

APPLICATION.

That we are all either the servants of Christ, or the slaves of the devil.

By nature we are all slaves to sin; and, in our own strength, we never could have delivered ourselves from that dreadful captivity. No human power could have burst the chains, with which Satan had bound us; but Christ, when He died upon the cross, opened a way of deliverance for us. No one, therefore, can now with truth say, It is impossible for me to live a godly life. There are, no doubt, many who think that their temptations are so strong, and their weakness so great, that they cannot help going on in evil ways, and doing as others do. But this is not true; they might do better if they would. And of this they will be convinced at the great judgment day. They will then acknowledge, with unavailing grief, that, if they had but looked to Christ for help, they might have been made free from the power of evil. Oh, how sad that any should find this out, when the knowledge of it will come too late! There is certainly nothing wanting to make us holy but a real and sincere desire. Alas! this is the very thing which most generally is wanting. How many there are who love the ways of sin too much to desire heartily to be delivered from them. These are the slaves of Satan. But perhaps they know it not, because they have never tried to resist his power. Reader, have you effectually resisted him, and cast off the bondage of corruption? Have you, through

the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, escaped from the pollutions of the world? The question of greatest importance for every one to ask is this, What master do I serve? All are either the servants of Christ, or the slaves of the devil. Now, which would you rather be—a slave, or a free servant? From countries where slavery exists, we constantly hear accounts of cruelty which make the blood run cold. But if British servants have cause to be thankful, that they are free to serve whom they will, and are not driven to their work by the terror of the whip, like beasts of burden, much, much more have they cause for rejoicing, who, by the grace of God, are set free from Satan's power. However shocking it may be to hear of a poor wretched slave flogged to death, there is comfort in knowing that the wrath of his master can extend no farther. From him death has set the sufferer free. But to what deliverance can the slave of Satan look forward, when once the day of grace is past? Now or never we must be set free from his hateful power. But, alas, too many are enchained without knowing it! Satan pleases men with great swelling words of vanity, or he allures them into his snare by assisting them to enjoy, quietly, the lusts of the flesh, persuading them that that is liberty. Thus, present gratification makes them insensible of their danger. Oh, Reader! if not quite sure that you are already free, lose not a day in seeking deliverance from this cruel master. Turn without delay. Turn with all your heart to Christ. It is the knowledge of Him which can alone set you free. Seek Him by prayer. Earnestly implore His help, and it shall not be in

vain ; for they that ask shall have. But if, on the other hand, you now rejoice in that freedom wherewith Christ has made you free, rejoice with trembling ; for, observe, there is no such thing as security on this side the grave. There is such a thing as being again entangled and overcome ; and then the latter end is worse than the beginning. It is, indeed, awful to think that any one who has known the way of righteousness can ever turn from it ; but that which will be our best preservative is the sense of fear. Let us watch and pray that we enter not into temptation ; and then that dreadful proverb will never be said of us, “ The dog is turned to his own vomit again ; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

PRAYER.

Almighty God, Thou alone canst preserve me from falling into error. Mercifully defend me from the influence of false teachers, who might even cause me to deny the Lord that bought me ; and so bring me with themselves to a quick destruction. Grant that I may never be led to doubt the truth of Thy holy Word, from wishing it to be untrue. Make me to stand in awe of Thy judgments, and to believe that, as truly as the angels who sinned were cast into hell, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire, so surely are all the ungodly upon earth reserved unto the day of judgment, to be punished. Help me to believe alike the promises and the threatenings contained in the Bible. And how-

ever great my difficulties may be, make me to rejoice in the assurance that Thou, Lord, knowest how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and that Thou wilt not suffer me to fall, while trusting in Thy Almighty help. But, O Lord, preserve me from a self-willed and presumptuous spirit. Make me humble in my thoughts of myself, and respectful towards others. Teach me to watch my own heart the more closely, from seeing how commonly the hearts of men are puffed up with pride. And mercifully suffer me not to deceive myself, and others, by the mere form of a religious profession, as worthless as a well without water; but grant that the presence of the Holy Spirit may be in me, as a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. And now, O Lord, if I have, indeed, escaped from the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, mercifully grant that I may never again be entangled therein, and overcome. Make me very fearful of sin, and careful to watch against even the appearance of evil; and help me in all respects to walk according to the holy commandments delivered unto us. Grant these my humble supplications, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER III.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 1 to 9.—St. Peter commences this last chapter of his last epistle by stating the principal

object he had in view in all his writings. He says, (1) This is now my second letter to you ; and in both of them my chief desire has been to keep in your remembrance the fact, that, although your minds have been purified by receiving the true doctrines of the Gospel, there yet is need of great watchfulness ; (2) and I beg you to be careful to hold fast the truth as you have received it from the written Word of the Prophets in the Old Testament, and from the instructions of us, the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. (3) And this I say the more earnestly, because I know that, in after times, men will arise who, from wishing to indulge unrestrainedly their sinful lusts, will be ready to scoff at religion, (4) and to say, What has become of the long-promised second coming of Jesus Christ ? for our forefathers, who preached this doctrine, have been long dead, and yet everything goes on just as it has done from the beginning of creation. (5) All the while they willingly shut their eyes to this fact, that the earth, which was made by God's creating power to stand partly out of the water, and partly under it, (6) was, at one time, by the word of His command, entirely covered ; and so everything died. (7) And as surely as that happened, so surely is the world kept as it is by the same power ; but only until the time, when God shall see fit to destroy it all by fire. And this He will do, at the great judgment day, when the wicked shall be condemned to everlasting perdition. (8) And, beloved brethren, remember this, though the delay may seem long to us, it is as nothing in the sight of God, to whom a thousand years, or one day, make no difference. (9) If, then, to us God should seem to be slow in

fulfilling His promise, we ought to consider that it is out of kindness He thus delays the final judgment, not liking that men should perish, but wishing all to be brought to repentance.

APPLICATION.

That we should endeavour to strengthen our convictions in the truth of God's Word.

It is, indeed, an awful thing to scoff at religion. And yet, it is to be feared, that in these days scoffers have arisen, as St. Peter said they would. Because men see not the vengeance of God immediately falling upon the wicked, they venture to say, they don't believe it ever will. But though they may say so, they do not really think so. They are not ignorant of the truth. They only pretend to be ignorant of it. They willingly shut their eyes, because they choose to walk after their own lusts, and do not choose to see what they know is coming upon them in consequence. Oh, what folly and madness this is! What would it profit a man, whose path lay by the side of a dreadful precipice, to bandage his eyes that he might not see his danger? Obviously it would increase his danger, and, in fact, make his ruin certain. We are all of us but too little influenced even by what we *say* we believe. So, then, instead of trying to persuade ourselves out of a judgment to come, we had need to strive hard to get our minds better impressed with it. We should

look upon the heavens and the earth, and consider that, though they go on year after year just the same, still that they are surely reserved as fuel for the flames, which will burst forth at the great judgment day. When we hear the thunder roll, and see the lightning flash, we cannot doubt but that God who made the world has power to destroy it, when He pleases; and, if we believe the Bible at all, we must believe that a day is coming, when it will be burnt up. A thunder-storm is often a very awakening thing. Thunder seems like the voice of God, calling men to repent, and to prepare for His coming; and while they hear the awful sound, and see the lightning flash, they cannot help feeling, "doubtless there is a God which judgeth the earth." Now, when our minds are affected in this awful manner, let us not try to drive away the wholesome impression; but, on the contrary, let us endeavour to make it useful in strengthening our faith in all that is unseen, but most real and true. If we feel terror at the thought that the lightning might have struck us dead, knowing that we are unfit to meet God, let us not think this a foolish fear, because so few die thus suddenly. But let us reflect why it is that God delays the awful stroke. He lengthens out our lives for the same purpose that He prolongs the continuance of the world, namely, because He is slow to take vengeance. He has no pleasure in the death of the sinner, but desires that all men should repent and turn, while they may. Though God may seem to be slack, as some men count slackness, it is not from indifference to sin, but from long-suffering mercy to the sinner. He is slow to wrath, and of great kindness, but in

the end He will by no means spare the guilty, or let the wicked go unpunished. For a time He will wait. Out of the endless ages of eternity, what are a thousand years to Him? No more, or not so much, as one day to us. He can, therefore, wait; but He will not wait for ever. Let us not, then, be willingly ignorant of what is surely coming upon this world to the perdition of ungodly men.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 10 to 14.—With regard to the judgment day, it matters not what man may think of it. The fact is, as the Apostle goes on to say, (10) that the great day of the Lord's appearing will come. And it will come in as unexpected a manner, as when a thief breaks into our house at night. In that day a tremendous noise will be heard, and the heavens will disappear, and everything will melt by reason of that awful fire, which is to burn up the earth, and all the works of man that are upon it. (11) If, then, it is the fact, that all by which we are now surrounded is shortly to pass away, what manner of life and conversation best becomes creatures thus situated? Assuredly our conversation ought to be so holy, and our hearts and lives so filled with godliness, that we might be able not only without fear, but even (12) with longing desire, to look forward to the day of God's coming, when the heavens and the earth are to melt away in flames of fire. (13) But though the world, as it now is, will be then burnt up, we confidently look forward, in dependence on God's promise, to enjoy a

new heaven and a new earth, where there will be nothing but perfect holiness. (14) And now, my beloved friends, since you entertain this glorious hope, let me persuade you to use all diligence, in order that you may be found by our Lord at His second coming, without spot and blameless, having made your peace with God through Him.

APPLICATION.

On what manner of men we ought to be.

A full and firm belief in the final destruction of this world, and of a judgment to come, would have a very useful effect in producing in us a holy life. But we must not only believe that such things will come to pass, but we must occupy our minds with them. We must frequently put home to our hearts the words of the Apostle: "Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of men ought ye to be?" We may well ask, What is the use of setting our hearts and affections on a world that is sure to be burnt up? We cannot stay here long; and if we could, we should only wait to hear the heavens depart with a great noise, and see the earth, with all that is in it, melt away with fervent heat. If the day of the Lord will come with such sounds and sights of terror, how diligently we ought to prepare ourselves to meet God! Such reflections as these might, in many cases, be most useful. For, alas! how many there are, who, if they seriously questioned themselves,

would be obliged to confess, We are not the manner of men we ought to be. How many there are who live as if the present state of things were to last for ever : their whole mind given up either to the cares or the joys of this life. All their thoughts are set upon providing for the body, and upon the things of time. To get on well in the world seems to be the one thing needful. And as to the state of the soul, and the preparation of the heart for meeting God, these are things they think little or nothing about. Oh, how very common, but how very sad it is, that men should thus live for time, instead of preparing for eternity. Reader, take the matter home to yourself, and consider how far the uncertainty of life, and the certainty of a judgment to come, have weighed with you to produce a proper effect. What manner of men we ought to be, is plain enough. We ought so to live as to be able to look death and judgment in the face without dismay. But how is this to be accomplished? The answer is, by learning to fear God. Whenever we are duly impressed with a fearful anxiety about His displeasure, we shall certainly make it our first and great business to obtain reconciliation with Him, through Jesus Christ. And it is a business in which none ever fail who are really in earnest. "Ask and ye shall have. Seek and ye shall find." Those who sincerely ask for the pardon of their sins, through Jesus Christ, and earnestly seek for the renewal of their hearts unto holiness, by the work of the Spirit, will be sure to find that peace with God, which turns the fear of death and judgment into a longing desire to depart, and be with Christ. It is the character of a real Christian, that

he is "looking for, and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." As a child stretches forth its arms, to hasten, if possible, a meeting with the parent it loves; so the soul of a Christian stretches forth, as it were, towards God, in longing desire to leave a world so full of sin and sorrow, and to enter upon that new heavens, and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. And now let us consider whether we, in any measure, possess these features of a Christian character. Let us judge ourselves, and see how far we are, in any degree, the sort of persons we ought to be. Are we so convinced of the unsatisfying and uncertain nature of all earthly things, as to be really anxious to prepare ourselves for something better? Can we say that, so far from clinging to the world, and all those things which are to perish with the using, we are looking forward, in dependence on God's promise, to a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness? Are we labouring with all diligence to be found of God in peace, when He comes? Are we striving now to live peaceably with all men? And are we, by faith, looking to the precious blood of Christ to wash out our guilt, that so we may stand perfect and complete in Him, without spot and blameless? If conscience gives to these questions a favourable answer, we have indeed nothing to fear.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 15 to 18.—St. Peter having spoken of the end of the world as certainly to precede the general judgment, and having alluded to the carelessness and

unbelief which would probably arise from the delay of punishment, proceeds to say: (15) But I would have you consider that this long-extended waiting and forbearance on God's part is intended to be our salvation; that is to say, it is granted as an opportunity in which to work out our salvation. And this is exactly what our beloved brother Paul has said in those divinely inspired epistles, which he has addressed to you, (16) and in all his other epistles, when speaking on this subject. In these letters of his, many things are spoken of which are of a mysterious nature, and difficult, of course, to be understood. Hence some men, ill-instructed in gospel truth, and consequently of wavering minds, have turned them, and indeed all other parts of Scripture also, to their own destruction. (17) Therefore, brethren, seeing that you are forewarned of the danger there is of a misunderstanding on these subjects, beware, lest you yourselves should be led into error by the influence of the wicked, and so fall at last, notwithstanding your present steadfastness. (18) But I trust, on the contrary, that you will continue to grow in grace, and to obtain a deeper acquaintance with all which has been done for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever.

APPLICATION.

On the study of Scripture.

St. Peter here says, that we should account that the long-suffering of God is salvation; that is to say,

we should gratefully acknowledge that this is the gracious design of God in delaying to punish sinners. And would to God that His gracious design always answered ! Would to God that all to whom He gives time for repentance so used it, as therein to work out the salvation of their souls. But, alas ! on the contrary, we often find that those who have been spared in a wonderful manner, either by recovering unexpectedly from illness, or by some hairbreadth escape from danger, only seem the more hardened by the long-suffering of God. They seem to think, that because He did not strike, when He appeared about to do so, the blow will never fall. The longer some men live, the less they think about dying. The older they grow, the harder they get. They make no good use of that time which the patience of God allows ; but, on the contrary, only lengthen out the catalogue of sins, for which they will have to be punished. Oh, how very ungrateful to God, how cruel to ourselves, if thus we turn to bad account that which was intended for our good ! This life is a state of trial, in which we may win or lose everything ; and God willeth not that any should perish : He would have us all to be saved. Nevertheless, man is so perverse, that he willeth not his own salvation ; and even the things which are most intended for his good are too often made an occasion of falling. The Bible, for instance, that Book of God which was given as a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths, to guide us in the way to heaven, is turned by many to their own destruction. It is a very dreadful thing to think, that the Book of God, which was written for our

learning, and to make us wise unto salvation, should thus be misused; but so it is, for St. Peter says, they that are unlearned and unstable so turn and twist the meaning of St. Paul's writings, and other portions of Scripture, as to prove the ruin of their souls. They study the Bible without prayer for the teaching of God's Spirit, and without sincerity in their inquiries after truth, and then they fancy they are led by the mind and will of God, while it is their own will, and not His, that they are following. Here, then, we have need of caution. While too many neglect the Bible altogether, others misuse it. Let us not thus trample our mercies under foot; but let us endeavour to profit by the goodness of God, whose "long-suffering is salvation" to those who know how to profit by it. Let us consider that as God in mercy permits us to live on year after year, it is our bounden duty carefully to study the Scriptures, as the only means of knowing what we must do to be saved. And if we have any regard for our eternal interests, we must not only read the Scriptures, but, moreover, we must take heed how we read them. Let it be observed that when St. Peter speaks of the unlearned, he does not mean such as the world call unlearned. That learning which is necessary for a right understanding of God's Word is quite different to any other sort of learning. A man who cannot even read, may yet be learned in the Scriptures; while a great philosopher may be the ignorant man, who has wrested them to his own destruction. What is required is a humble spirit, that seeks, in all simplicity and sincerity, to be taught of God. Therefore, the unlearned in divine

things are those who have neglected or despised the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Again, let it be observed that we must never rest satisfied with what we already know, or cease to fear that we may be led astray. The Apostle was addressing those who were well instructed in the truth. Still, he says, Beware lest ye also, being led away with the errors of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. We must watch that we neither fall back nor stand still. There is no proof of life in spiritual things, without we are constantly growing in grace, and feel that we are becoming more and more acquainted with the truth as it is in Jesus.

PRAYER.

O Lord God, I beseech Thee to send Thy Holy Spirit into my heart, that by the reading of Thy Word I may be stirred up to a continual remembrance of holy things. And grant that I may fully believe, and diligently attend to the words spoken of old by the Prophets, and by the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. Preserve me from the company of those who scoff at religion, and from all those evil habits which would make me wish to be ignorant Thy Word. Impress my mind with a continual remembrance that the day of judgment is surely coming, and with a most awful dread of that perdition which awaits ungodly men. Knowing that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, help me diligently to prepare for it. Teach me so to live as cometh a disciple of Christ, in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto

the coming of the day of God ; and grant that when that day shall arrive, I may be found of Thee in peace, without spot and blameless, for the sake of Jesus Christ. And now, O Lord, if I have hope in Christ, teach me to beware lest, being led away by the error of the wicked, I fall from my own steadfastness. Help me, with all meekness and humility, with all earnestness and diligence, to study those holy Scriptures, which so many unstable souls wrest to their own destruction. And I do earnestly pray that thus I may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN.

CHAPTER I.

EXPLANATION.

VERSE 1 to 4.—This epistle of St. John begins without any address. We are not told by whom it was written, or for whom it was intended. But it is a well-known fact, that the writer of it was the beloved Apostle St. John, and it is assuredly intended for the instruction and comfort of all who will listen to it, and receive it as addressed to themselves. Although not a hundred years had passed since our blessed Lord's death and resurrection, errors of the worst kind had sprung up, and were taught by men calling themselves Christians. Some denied that Jesus Christ was God; while others said that He had no human body. It is very evident from the commencement of his epistle, that St. John was thinking of these false teachers, and endeavouring to counteract the mischief they were doing. He enters upon his subject at once, and says, (1) I am about to declare unto you what I know to be the truth from the beginning. What I tell you, is what I have myself heard, and what I have seen with my own eyes; for I have most attentively looked upon,

and even with my hands have handled, Him who is the Word of Life. (2) For the Life (that is God) became visible to human eyes, when He took upon Him a mortal nature; for I saw Him, and am a faithful witness to tell you what I know concerning that Eternal Being who is one with the invisible Father, but who made Himself visible on earth, when He took upon Himself a form plainly to be seen by all. (3) Thus, then, we declare unto you what we have seen and heard, in order that you may have communion with us, and share the same blessings and privileges which, by the grace of God, we possess. And truly our privilege is great: nothing less than to enjoy a holy communion with the Father; and with His Son Jesus Christ. (4) And we write to you on this subject for the express purpose, that your joy may be made complete.

APPLICATION.

That religion makes us happy only when we become rightly acquainted with ourselves and with God.

Happy, indeed, are they who, with sincerity of heart, can echo the words of St. John, and say, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ." To this happiness we are all called by the blessed Gospel. It was nothing short of this, which the Apostle aimed at in writing his epistle: and if we receive his words in the full power thereof, we shall experience what he desired

for us, namely, that our joy may be full. And never let us rest satisfied with anything short of that which it was the object of the inspired writers to produce in the minds of their readers. What St. John desired is what God also desires for us, that is to say, true spiritual happiness. And if we do not feel that we have attained to it, it would be well for us seriously to inquire the reason why we have not. With some, alas! religion is a matter of little or no importance. They give no attention to the concerns of the soul; and, of course, they neither expect nor seek to find any happiness from it. But there are many who fancy that religion is with them a very chief concern, and yet who know nothing of the fulness of joy which St. John wished to procure for those to whom he wrote. Where this is the case, it arises from not having paid a due regard to the subject, of which the Apostle treats, namely, the nature, human and divine, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The two chief things which religion is intended to teach are, the knowledge of ourselves, and the knowledge of God. And this is what people too generally overlook. They think of religion as consisting merely in an attendance upon public worship, and in the performance of certain duties. The fact is, it leads to all this; but it neither begins nor ends there. The foundation of real religion must be laid much deeper. No course of mere outward action, however excellent, will bring solid peace, or cause substantial joy. To attain these, we must, in the first place, learn to know ourselves, to feel our sinfulness and its consequences. Secondly, to understand the nature of that God with whom we have to do. Our blessed Lord,

in addressing His heavenly Father, said, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." (John xvii. 3.) And this is what St. John felt and acted upon. He knew that if he could but lead people properly to consider the nature of God, and to understand what God, in the person of Christ, had done for them, the foundation of real religion would be laid; and the consequence of such a knowledge of, and acquaintance with God, would be the possession of a peace, such as the world can neither give nor take away. It is true, we cannot with our eyes see, and with our hands handle, the Word of Life, as the Apostle did, when that Divine Life was manifested upon earth in human form. But this, happily, is not necessary. We may have fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ, without this. But if we have not sight, we must have faith: faith in lively exercise. We must read the Bible, not with careless indifference, but with an earnest desire of becoming acquainted with God in regard to all which He has revealed to us of Himself. If we can but stir up ourselves to feel that degree of terror which a just view of our danger without a Saviour would produce, we shall learn to understand and value aright what was done for us when that Eternal Life, which was with the Father, became manifested upon earth to take away our sins. We may rest assured of this, that the reason why our joy is not full as St. John wished it to be, is owing to our not having sufficiently considered our condition as sinners on the brink of ruin, so as to be able fully to value the work of God accomplished

for us, when He became man. We have not reflected enough upon the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of that love, which brought the God of heaven down to earth. We have been so engaged with the trifling concerns of this vain world, that the Word which was made flesh and dwelt among us has been too little thought of. This is the real cause why religion is not the source of our happiness, as it ought to be. As St. John thought to make our joy complete by setting before us the true doctrine of an incarnate God, so, if we would secure his object, we must see to it that our minds dwell frequently and deeply on this most wonderful and glorious subject, God made man for our sakes ! We cannot thus know God without loving Him ; and to those who really love Him, God does, in a certain sense, even now, manifest Himself. He is with them, as He is not with the world, according to the promise of our Saviour contained in the 14th chapter of St. John's Gospel, " If a man love me he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." And it is elsewhere written, " I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God" (2 Cor. vi. 16) ; and then they can very justly say, " Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." Unless this is what we are aiming at, our religion is not worth having. This it is which alone makes people truly happy here on earth, and is the sure foretaste and pledge of that fulness of joy which is at God's right hand for evermore.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 5 to 7.—Understand, then, says St. John, that the important message which we are divinely commissioned to deliver unto you is this: that God is light and holiness itself, and that there is no shadow of darkness in Him; from which it follows, that (6) if we profess to have a share in those blessed privileges which belong to Christians, in connexion with God, while, at the same time, we indulge in works of darkness and impurity, we speak not the truth, our works belie our words. (7) But if we so believe, as to make it plain, that we are in some measure moulded after the image of God; then we are partakers of all which belongs to His real people, and we are cleansed from all sin by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION.

Without a growing likeness to God in His hatred of sin, we cannot hope to be saved.

Darkness and light are here, as in many places of Scripture, used to express sin and holiness; and well they may be, for sin is in its nature black and ugly, seeking seclusion, and not fit to meet the face of day; while holiness is all purity, like the light. There is nothing so pure as light; therefore light is the best

emblem of God, the perfect holiness of whose nature is the most important subject for our consideration, because the end and object of all religion is, to restore us to that likeness to God, which was lost when Adam fell. All those who will eventually be saved have been, from all eternity, predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son. We must, therefore, understand and know what that image is, in order to have any correct notion concerning our own relationship to Him, and our consequent hopes as to salvation. We all depend upon God as the creatures of His hand ; as the beings whom He has made and upholds. In this connexion to Him we must stand, for we could not draw another breath without His permission ; but whether or not we may be truly said to have fellowship with Him, is another, and a very different question. We may call ourselves His children, and own Him as the Father of mercies, and Giver of all good gifts ; and yet perhaps He may not own us among His true children. If we are not looking to Him constantly for that purifying Spirit, which alone can enable us to walk in the light, we may rest assured that we have neither part nor lot in the salvation that has been so wonderfully wrought out for us by Jesus Christ. This is the only thing we have to judge our state by. The question we must all ask ourselves is this, Am I growing in likeness to God? God, we know, is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Sin is, in His sight, intensely hateful ; and yet we cannot but observe, that it is regarded by most people in a very different light. How shocking it is to hear the way in which many people speak of sin, as though it were the most trifling and indifferent

thing possible, even in many cases making it a subject of laughter and merriment. These very people might perhaps be shocked at the idea of committing the sin, which yet they think it no harm to laugh and joke about. But is sin, (a thing so shocking in the sight of God,) a proper subject for laughter? And is it not evident, that those who thus lightly regard it can have no fellowship with God? If they pretend to it, they lie, and do not the truth. Let us, then, each consider how far we are like God, as regards our hatred of sin; and how far we are really longing and striving after holiness. The best of men are not entirely free from sin, but the weakest child of God entirely hates it. And if we can, in this hatred of sin, claim kindred with all the dear children of God, then we may know, to our joy, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin; that, in fact, we are, for His sake, counted holy, even as God is holy.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 8 to 10.—While St. John would have us deeply impressed with the conviction, that without holiness of heart and life there can be no fellowship with God, he would not have us suppose that a sinless perfection is required; so far from it, he goes on to say, (8) If we should pretend to be altogether free from sin, we should certainly lie under a great mistake, and be very far from speaking the truth. (9) But, on the contrary, if we humbly confess our sins, then God, who is ever true to His word, will, according to His faithful promise, forgive us our sins, and

purify us from all unrighteousness. (10) In fact, if we should say that we were without sin, we should make God a liar, because He has positively declared the contrary, and thus His holy Word would be put aside.

APPLICATION.

Confession of sin necessary to salvation.

Notwithstanding what is here written, there are some persons bold and ignorant enough to talk of being perfectly free from sin ; of whom we can only say, What will not Satan do to deceive and blind mankind ? But, though there are certainly some, there are not many who would venture to say that they have no sin ; and yet there are a great many who really think it ; that is to say, who have no consciousness of sin. There is nothing more common than for persons to speak of themselves at church as miserable sinners, who yet would be exceedingly angry with any one else who was so to speak of them ; and who, in fact, do not really so think of themselves. They have not sufficiently watched the workings of their own minds to discover the evil that dwells there ; and as to the faults of conduct or language, into which they may occasionally fall, they always find for themselves some excuse, so that these things are made to appear too trifling to be worthy of the name of sins. Now, although such persons as these do not actually make God a liar, by saying that His Word, which condemns us all, is not true ; still, such a state of mind is fearfully dangerous. We

cannot but look on their condition as very much like that of a man sleeping on the edge of an awful precipice, where, without consciousness of danger, he may any moment give himself a turn, by which he would inevitably be dashed to pieces. Is this, then, our condition? It is surely worth an inquiry. And, in order to ascertain the fact, let us consider whether we are more in the habit of excusing our faults, and making light of them, or of confessing them with a broken and contrite spirit. In the one case we have much to fear; in the other we are safe. The penitent sinner, who is distressed and grieved by the constant repetition of evil thoughts and wrong feelings, against which he may seem to be struggling almost in vain, is no doubt undergoing a most painful conflict; but still he may be considered as an enviable being, because he has God on his side. He possesses a promise of pardon, which will not fail to be accomplished. The blessed Gospel, which is a message to man from his Maker, represents our eternal salvation as a free gift to all who have repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And to this word of promise God will be faithful. There is, therefore, comfort, the best of comfort, for every penitent sinner; for we are told that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin; that is, from all sin that is mourned over with godly sorrow. In fact, the sin which is now our grief will not be our ruin; and may God give us all a just knowledge of ourselves, and grace to confess our sins with that humiliation and brokenness of heart which will secure our pardon, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYER.

O Lord, who didst graciously permit Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be made manifest upon earth for our sakes, mercifully grant that I may so thoroughly feel and lament the evil of my own heart, that I may know how, in some measure, to value, as I ought, my blessed Saviour. And grant that I may so believe and rejoice in the fulness of His finished work, that truly my fellowship may be with Thee, and with Thy Son, Jesus Christ, and that my joy in Thee may be full. O Lord, grant that I may ever walk in the light, as Thou art in the light, hating all manner of sin and darkness. And do Thou mercifully assist me, by Thy grace, effectually to struggle with the corruption of my nature ; and give me faith to believe that, through the precious blood of Christ, I shall in due time be cleansed from all my sins. To Thee, O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be glory and honour, for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 1 to 11.—St. John was a very old man when he wrote this epistle, having far outlived all the other Apostles ; he therefore takes upon himself the privilege of age, and with all the dignity and

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tenderness of a father, he thus addresses his Christian brethren : (1) My little children, the chief object I have in writing to you, is to remind you, that by our holy religion you are forbidden to commit any manner of sin. At the same time, if, through the power of temptation, any one does fall into sin, they need not despair, because there is one who will plead our cause for us with our Heavenly Father, that is, Jesus Christ the righteous. (2) He it is who has offered an all-sufficient sacrifice to atone for our sins; and not only sufficient to blot out our sins, who believe in Him, but sufficient also for the sins of the whole world. (3) And observe, the way to prove that we have a saving knowledge of Him is by keeping His commandments. (4) For whosoever says that he has the true knowledge of God, and yet lives in disobedience to His law, is a liar; there is no truth in him. (5) But if a man guides his life and conduct by the rule of the Holy Scriptures, then in him God's love to mankind is producing its perfect effect; and it is in this way only, that we can know that we are His true disciples. (6) If any man says that he dwells in Christ, he must prove it by carefully following that holy example, which He set us. (7) Brethren, in all this I am giving you no new commandment. That the law of God teaches holiness is what you must have known from the very beginning. (8) And yet in one sense I do write unto you a new commandment, for I set before you the law of love in a new light. New, as regards the manner in which it has been exhibited by Christ, and also as it is now to be shown forth by you His disciples. Because on this subject there was before

much darkness. But it has now passed away, giving place to the full light of truth; (9) so that if any one pretends to have received the light of the blessed gospel, and yet hates his brother, he is most assuredly still in darkness; (10) while he who thoroughly loves his brother, thereby gives a proof that he is enjoying true gospel light; and therefore there is nothing in him, which is likely to occasion his falling into sin. (11) But he who hates his brother is still in the darkness of an unconverted state, and knows not into what degree of sin he may fall, because the darkness in which he lives makes him blind to what is right and wrong.

APPLICATION.

That we are followers of Christ only if we keep the law of love.

In this passage of Scripture we are plainly told how impossible it is for any man to be religious, who allows himself to indulge in any thing which he knows to be wrong. Any one who thinks himself at liberty to commit the smallest sin, does not know God, and he is a liar if he says he does. It seems strange that any one can suppose God to be so indifferent as not to care whether His laws are attended to or not.

If even God were such an one as ourselves, how could we imagine that He would be thus trifled with. But while St. John tells us we do not know God if we make light of sin, he yet has a word of great comfort for every one who truly hates the sin into

which he may have fallen. He bids us not despair of pardon, when we duly seek it. He reminds us that Jesus Christ is the penitent sinner's Advocate. An advocate is one who defends the cause of another. Now if we duly reflect upon what it is to have an advocate with the Father, it will surely give us very great comfort. A man, when he is to be tried before an earthly judge always wishes to have an advocate, (that is to say a lawyer) to defend his cause for him; but if it be a bad cause, perhaps with his best endeavours, he may not be able to defend him. This, however, can never be the case, when we have Christ for our advocate. Though our cause be ever so bad to begin with, yet if He undertakes to plead for us, He will be sure to succeed. He has offered an all-sufficient sacrifice to atone for the sins of the whole world, and He would effectually plead the cause of every living creature, if only all were willing to be saved upon the conditions which He proposes. But, alas! it is not everybody who wishes, or tries, to obey the Word of God; and Jesus Christ will not be the advocate of wilful sinners. Reader, do you think He will plead for you? Are you applying to Him now to undertake your cause, knowing that, without His intercession for you, you cannot stand before a holy God? Mark these words: "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments;" that is to say, if we try to keep them; for if we really did keep them, we should not need an advocate. Judging by the lives of men, it is to be feared that many who now fancy that they know Christ will at the judgment-day find, to their great dismay, that at any rate He will not choose to know

them. They may then say, Lord, Lord; but He will answer, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." It is clear enough that we must take the Bible as the rule of our lives, or we must not hope that God's great love in sending His Son to die for us will be of any use; and especially we must judge whether or not the light of the blessed Gospel is shining upon us, by considering how we keep the law of love. "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness." And there are many in darkness who do not know it, for they think all is well, because they do not actually hate any one.

But observe, in the Gospel there is a new law as regards the subject of love. The true light which Christ has thrown upon it is this, that because He laid down His life for sinners, we ought not only not to hate, but to love our enemies. If, verily, the love of God be perfected in us, it makes a wonderful alteration in our feelings towards each other. It is the marked feature of the Gospel, that it changes people's hearts, so that they bear with one another in love. The real Christian deeply feels the corruption of his own nature, and knows what an evil and a bitter thing sin is; and therefore he has a pitiful and tender feeling towards all sinners, such as no worldly man ever has. Let us then examine ourselves, and see whether we have received and understood the new commandment; whether with us "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth."

EXPLANATION.

Verse 12 to 17.—St. John had used the endearing name of little children to all Christians in general, but now he addresses them according to their different ages and degrees of knowledge. (12) He says, I write unto you, little children, to remind you that your sins are forgiven you, for the sake of Jesus Christ. (13) And to you, fathers, I write, wishing to remind you of the experimental knowledge you have had of Him who is from all eternity. And to you, young men, I would say, rejoice, because in the time of greatest temptation you are effectually resisting the devil. And again, to you, little children, I say, be thankful that you have been brought to know God as your heavenly Father. (14) Yes, fathers, I write to you with satisfaction, because of your having known the Son of God, who is from all eternity; and to you, young men, because you are strong to resist temptation, from having a constant regard to the Word of God, and thus you are enabled to resist your spiritual enemy. And now, to one and all let me say, (15) Love not the world, nor the things that are in it. Whoever gives his heart to worldly things cannot love God, as he ought to do. (16) For certainly we are not guided by the love of God, if we allow ourselves to gratify the sinful desires of the flesh, or make it our study to please our own tastes, or yield ourselves to the feelings of pride. All these things are worldly. (17) And remember, the world will pass away; and all its sinful gratifications must soon have an end.

But he who labours to please God will live in happiness for ever and ever.

APPLICATION.

That it is our interest as well as our duty to live above the world, though occupied with its concerns.

Here we see that St. John's object is to excite Christians to further exertions, by leading them to rejoice over their spiritual mercies, at the same time that he warns them of their danger from the evil world, in which they live. It is certainly true that a cheerful spirit is always the most likely to be an active one; and, therefore, it is better for us to dwell upon our privileges and blessings, as Christians, rather than to pore over those many causes of sorrow and humiliation, which belong even to the holiest while in this world of trial. And what can better promote in us an habitually cheerful spirit than a frequent remembrance of St. John's words, "Your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake"? And this, observe, he writes to little children, evidently meaning young Christians, that is to say, inexperienced and fearful followers of Christ. In order to begin a really religious course, we must, as a first step, learn to feel the misery of sin, while we acknowledge the efficacy of the death of Christ to atone for it. Without this we are not worthy to be called even little children in the family of Christ. But if we do thus feel the burden of our sins, and look to the blood of Jesus as that which alone can wash them out, we

need not, and we ought not, to doubt that our sins are forgiven. But whether we are only just beginning our Christian course, or whether we have, through long years of conflict, experienced the power of God's grace, the warning voice is alike needful to all, "love not the world." So long as we continue here below, we shall be in danger of caring too much for the things of the world; and for this reason, because duty demands that we should be continually occupied with our worldly affairs. We are not at liberty to lay them aside. We cannot fly to the solitary desert, nor shut ourselves up in the retirement of a convent. This would be to desert the path, in which God requires us to walk. No; we must each of us perseveringly perform the duties of the station, in which God has placed us. But then, how difficult it is to have our hands full of one thing, and our hearts full of another. It is, indeed, a most difficult thing. But this is the great trial of life; this is the conflict in which we are all engaged. It may be a hard matter to get our hearts weaned from earth; it may be difficult to continue through life as a stranger and a pilgrim, having our affections fixed on things above; but, when we consider the end, we may be sure that a life of self-denial and discipline, however painful it may be, is the only wise course to pursue. No doubt, if we follow the ways of the world, we may have more present ease, and if we *can* gratify our natural desires without restraint, we may have therein present pleasure.

No one can deny, that to indulge a wish is much more agreeable than to resist it. But all this will soon be over. Whatever the fashion of our lives may

now be, a change will come. The grave is waiting **for us**; and where then will be our fleshly indulgences, **or** our gratified pride? The drunkard must leave **his** cups, and the man of fashion give up all the **beautiful** things his eyes and heart have revelled in. Then the pampered body must fall to decay, and **become** a loathsome heap of corruption. . And what **will** then become of the immortal soul? That **can-not** pass away with the world, which has hitherto **been** its portion. St. John answers not this question; he is silent on the dreadful subject. But St. Paul, speaking of those who mind earthly things, tells us, "Their end is destruction." (Phil. iii. 19.) Whereas we know, "He that doeth the will of God **abideth** for ever." And now let us ask ourselves seriously whether we are most interested in seeking our present ease and happiness from worldly things, or are living according to the will of God, as it is revealed to us in holy Scripture.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 18 to 25.—As the Christians were persecuted by the Jews, and no doubt harassed in mind by the false teachers among themselves, St. John, to comfort them, says, (18) Little children, remember that the last hour of the Jewish nation is near at hand: for you know our Lord foretold, that before the destruction of Jerusalem many false Christs would arise. And as there are so many now who teach false doctrine concerning Christ, we may, on that account, feel sure that the end is approaching.

(19) These men originally professed to agree with us; but we may be sure that they never received the truth into their hearts, for if they had ever been real Christians, they would not have separated from us. But by their separating themselves from us, and openly teaching false doctrine, they make it plain that their religious profession was always unsound.

(20) You, however, have been taught by the Holy Spirit, and therefore know the truth; (21) and I write to you, not because I think you are ignorant of the Gospel, but, on the contrary, because you know what is true, and will not receive as the truth that which is a lie. (22) And who can be a greater liar than any one who denies that Jesus is the anointed Son of God? He is, properly speaking, Antichrist, who denies the oneness of the Father and the Son; (23) for he who denies the Godhead of the Son has not properly received the knowledge of God the Father; but he who rightly understands and acknowledges the Son, understands also the proper way of approaching God the Father. (24) Let me then beg of you to hold fast that true doctrine which you have received; for if you steadfastly hold the Gospel truth, you will continue to enjoy the blessedness of a holy communion with God, the Father and the Son. (25) And remember, that which He has promised to us is nothing less than the enjoyment of everlasting life.

APPLICATION.

That we must be all taught of God.

It cannot but grieve the real Christian to observe the number of false religions which are set up in the world ; but when considering this painful subject, it is no small satisfaction to remember, that we are told in Scripture, " Antichrist shall come ;" and therefore we must not be disheartened by the abundance of false teaching by which we are surrounded ; only we must learn to be on our guard, and carefully watch that we ourselves be not influenced by it. And, let it be well observed, there is no teaching to be relied upon but that which is here called the unction of the Holy One : that is to say, the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Our Saviour says we must be all taught of God. There is no teaching which will save the soul, but that which cometh from God. How important, then, for each one to ask, Am I taught of God ? Men are too apt to trust to their fellow-men as guides ; and we know if the blind lead the blind, what the consequence will be. Let us not, then, despise our fellow-men, as instruments whom God may be pleased to use ; but let us beware how we put them in God's stead, or so trust to any human teaching as to forget our need of something more. It is certainly true, that unless the Holy Spirit direct our minds into a knowledge of the truth, we shall never savingly understand the Gospel. Perhaps there is no one thing more important to be impressed on every mind, than our need of

heavenly teaching. Those who are learned are too apt to think there is nothing they cannot understand; they do not, therefore, go with the humility of a child to be taught of God. Again, those who are ignorant too often think that their want of knowledge may be taken as an excuse for their faults, and therefore they take no pains to learn the will of God. Thus the pride of human intellect, on the one side, and careless indifference on the other, alike prove fatal to the soul. Surely when we consider the many Antichrists now busy in the world, we may justly fear being misled. On the one side, we hear of new revelations, which we are called upon to believe, by the Mormonites and the Irvingites, &c.; and, on the other side, we are pressed again to fall into the old idolatry of the Roman Catholics. And oh! how easily we may be led to believe some of these many lies, if we are not, with humble and earnest prayer, seeking to be taught of God. While God is duly honoured, there is no danger; if we acknowledge Christ as our only Saviour, the Spirit as our only teacher, and God the Father as reconciled to us only for His Son's sake, then we need not doubt but that we shall be upheld through all dangers, and be enabled, by that God in whom we trust, to hold fast the truth, and to abide in Him until the end. But if we trust in our own wisdom, or in the teaching of man, we dishonour God, and may well expect that God will allow us to fall into all manner of error. Let us, then, carefully watch against two things—the pride of intellect, and the indifference of a worldly mind, and constantly pray for the unction of the Holy One.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 26 to 29.—To speak of false brethren must always be a painful thing; but St. John writes to comfort, and not to distress; he therefore adds, (26) Thus much I have thought it right to say concerning those who try to deceive you, and draw you away from the truth. But I would again remind you, for your comfort, that (27) the teaching which you have received from God is that which will abide for ever, and you need no human teaching. That which you have received is the truth, and no lie; and having been thus taught, you will continue to draw spiritual life from Christ. (28) And now, little children, in conclusion, let me exhort you to be careful that you do thus live by faith in Christ; so that when He shall appear to judge the world, we, your teachers, may feel confident of your acceptance, and have no cause for shame on your account, when we stand together before Him. (29) And observe this; if you know, as you certainly do, that Jesus Christ is righteous, you must be aware that he only who walks in the ways of righteousness is born of Him.

APPLICATION.

That there is much in Scripture which is beyond man's understanding.

Any one who reads the Scriptures with care and consideration must often be struck with apparent contradictions. In the passage before us we have an

instance of this kind. In verse 27, St. John seems to wish to comfort his disciples by pointing out to them their security; and in the next verse he gives them an exhortation which, if they were perfectly secure, would be quite useless. He first says, "Ye shall abide in Him," as if it were certain that they would always continue in the faith of Christ; and then He says, "Now, little children, abide in Him," as if it were not a certain thing, but dependant, in some measure, on themselves. Such is the manner in which it has pleased God to instruct us, in order, no doubt, to exercise our humility and teachableness. Some there are who, in the pride of reason, expect to understand all the deep things of God, and, therefore, they refuse to believe that which they find it difficult to explain. But let us not so deal with God's sacred Word; we may not be able fully to reconcile statements, which appear to us contradictory, but we must not, on that account, say that both cannot be true; on the contrary, we must believe that whatever we find written in Holy Scripture is certainly true, but that there is much weakness of comprehension, and want of knowledge in ourselves to understand it.

We must, therefore, pray for more spiritual light, and ask God to enable us to know in what way He would have us to receive those doctrines, which seem to us dark and difficult; and then, no doubt, we shall be enabled to apply to ourselves the comforting portions of Scripture, without overlooking any of the warnings and exhortations which it contains. Now, in regard to the passage before us, we certainly learn from it that those who are taught by the Spirit of

God need not that any man teach them, because that which they have learned is the truth, and no lie, and to such it is a most sweet promise that they shall abide in Him; but no one for a certainty can say, This promise belongs to me. We can only hope that it belongs to us. But we must never forget that most certainly to us does belong the exhortation, "Abide in Him;" that is to say, watch, labour, pray, in order that ye may abide. This is the only true safeguard. It is because a real Christian fears to fall, that he never does fall: he abides for ever in Christ. But there are many, alas! who greatly deceive themselves, they fancy that they have received that anointing which is from God, but it is evident that herein they are woefully mistaken, because they are not bringing forth proper fruits.

Observe what is said in the 29th verse; there we learn, that as a child partakes of its father's nature, so all who are born of God partake of God's nature. If we know that He is righteous, of which there can be no doubt, then it is by a life of righteousness only that we are proved to be His children. Oh, Reader, let no false teacher deceive you in this matter; let not your own heart deceive you; you may have knowledge in the things of God, and much ability in speaking of them, but this proves nothing. The question is, Have you an anxious desire to be like God in holiness? Are you going on unto perfection? Are you gradually conquering your evil tempers? Do you increase in humility? Do you abound more and more in love? In short, is a growing likeness to our holy and righteous God the proof that the anointing which you have received is from God?

Let these words be deeply impressed on your minds, "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him."

PRAYER.

O gracious and merciful God, I humbly desire to approach Thee in the name of Thy most blessed Son, our all-prevailing Advocate with Thee. I confess that I have greatly sinned; but help me to repent. Enable me to look with faith to Jesus Christ the righteous, as the great propitiation for my sins. Grant that I may not deceive myself with a vain profession of repentance and faith, but enable me to prove that I know Him as my Saviour, by endeavouring to keep all His commandments. O Lord, I do indeed desire to abide in Christ, that I may walk even as He walked, in the exercise of holy love. Keep me evermore in the light of truth. I pray that all darkness in me may pass away, and that the true light may shine more and more. Enable me at all times to rejoice in the blessed assurance that my sins are forgiven me, for Christ's sake. Help me evermore to fight against, and overcome the wicked one, by the power of Thy word abiding in me. Grant me deliverance from the love of the world and all things in it. Preserve me from yielding at any time to the lusts of the flesh, and the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. Impress my mind with a remembrance that the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; while those only who do Thy will abide for ever. O Lord, mercifully preserve me from falling into the snares of any of those false teachers who

would draw me away from my hope in Christ. I pray that I may evermore be under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and receive the truth into my heart, in the full power thereof. I beseech Thee enable me continually to rejoice in the promise which Thou hast promised us of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. And when Christ shall appear, grant that I may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. Through whom I now offer up these prayers, and to whom, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER III.

VERSE 1 to 10.—Under a strong feeling of the astonishing love of God towards His rebellious creatures, St. John begins this chapter with an exclamation of wonder. He says, (1) Behold!—that is, think what an amazing love God has shown towards us, in adopting as His children such creatures as we are, and calling us His sons. People of the world do not understand the nature of our happiness; and no wonder that they are ignorant of us, since they are ignorant of God. (2) Beloved brethren, we are now, as I have said, exceedingly blessed in being admitted into the family of God on earth; but what we shall enjoy hereafter is beyond all imagination. This, however, we do know, that when we shall be admitted to the presence of God, we shall be glori-

fied with Him, we shall be made like Him, for we shall see and know Him in a way, which we cannot do now. (3) Of course every one who has a hope of thus being one day made like God, tries now to purify himself from all sin, and to become as like God as he possibly can. (4) He that wilfully commits sin sets God's law at defiance. To act in opposition to the known will of God is sin, (5) and we know that Jesus Christ came into the world on purpose to deliver us from sin; and in Him was no sin at all. (6) Whosoever, therefore, lives by faith in Him, does not commit sin; and it is certain that those who do willingly commit sin, have not, with saving faith, seen or known Him. (7) My dear children, let no one deceive you with the idea that you may indulge in sin, and yet be a believer in Christ. Those only are counted righteous who strive to be righteous, even as He is righteous. (8) Whosoever practises wilful sin, proves himself to be a child of the devil, for the devil has been a sinner from the beginning. But the Son of God became a man, on purpose that He might destroy the devil's work. (9) A real child of God never lives in sin, for the seed of spiritual life sown in his heart by the Holy Ghost continues to abide in him, and makes it impossible that he should willingly commit sin; the love of sin is contrary to his new nature, as being born of God. (10) This is what marks the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil. Whoever does not live a righteous life is not one of God's children, neither is he one of them, who has not a feeling of love towards all his fellow-creatures.

APPLICATION.

How to judge whether or not we are children of God.

Nothing is more clearly expressed in Scripture than the certainty that sin and salvation cannot go together; but, perhaps, no portion of the New Testament enforces it more fully than the one before us. No one who believes what St. John here says can maintain, that it is possible to continue in the practice of any known sin, or indulge in any unholy temper, and yet be saved. This is a portion of God's Word of such deep interest and importance, that we cannot do better than read it over frequently, and consider our own character by the light it gives. Here we have a rule, by which we may judge whether we are the children of God, or the children of the devil. But, perhaps, some people will be inclined to think they are neither one nor the other. It may be they shrink with horror from the idea of being children of the devil, and yet they are not bringing forth those fruits of righteousness, which would enable them, decidedly, to think themselves the children of God. Nevertheless, it is most certainly true, that they must be either the one or the other. This is an awful consideration, which ought to be duly weighed by all those who may be called half-and-half Christians, of whom, alas! there are a great many. Seeing, then, that we must be either one thing or the other, either the child of God or the child of the devil, let us seriously inquire which it is. Observe, then, what St. John

says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." Now, certainly, he does not mean that such an one is perfectly free from sin, because he begins his letter with stating, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." But wilful sin is that which he who is born of God does not commit, he cannot do it, because his will is changed, he has not the will to sin; in consequence of being born of God, he has obtained a new nature, to which sin is hateful, therefore, though he may fall into it by reason of that old nature which still remains to be struggled against, yet wilfully and habitually he cannot sin; those, therefore, who allow themselves to do what they know is wrong, or who make excuses, and find reasons for indulging in unholy tempers and dispositions, are certainly children of the devil. As he was a sinner from the beginning, so they show their likeness to him, by following his ways. While those are the children of God, who have a thorough hatred of sin, who are constantly watching, striving, and praying against it. In this way they gradually overcome more and more every evil temper, and every wrong propensity. Moreover, having a devoted love to God, they endeavour to show it forth by such good works as are pleasing to Him. If, then, there is not in us an abiding anxiety to conquer sin, and live a holy life, if we are self-indulgent and careless whether our tempers and dispositions be right or wrong, the question is settled, we are not born of God, according to the meaning of the Apostle; and we must, therefore, be the children of the devil. As a tree is known by its fruits, so are men known by their conduct. It is not for one man

to judge another; but it is every man's business to judge himself according to this rule, and happy they who have the testimony of their conscience to prove that they perfectly hate sin, and are labouring to purify themselves, even as God is pure. They are happy, indeed, even now, for they have peace with God by abiding in Christ, who appeared on earth purposely that He might destroy the works of the devil, and purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. And, after death, their prospects are bright and glorious beyond all imagination. We know not at present what the happiness of heaven will be. Even the beloved Apostle John, who wrote this letter, and to whom was given the fullest revelation of future glory, could say but little about it. But this he does tell us, that "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither will there be any more pain." (Rev. xxi. 4.) And surely this is enough. If we can but regard ourselves as indeed the sons of God, we shall exclaim continually, with wonder and praise, Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us! and our earnest desire will be more and more to show forth our love in return.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 11 to 17.—In describing what it is to be born again, St. John had made the remark, that none can be a child of God who loveth not his brother; and he thus continues, (11) You have, as it were, received a message on this subject from Jesus Christ, who, from the very beginning, declared plainly that

love should be the peculiar mark of His followers. He said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one toward another." (St. John xii. 35.) (12) The opposite of this we see in the case of Cain, who, by the hatred which caused him to kill his brother, proved himself to be a child of the wicked one. And why did he kill his brother? For no other reason than because he knew his own ways were wrong, and his brother's right. (13) You need not, therefore, wonder if you are hated by the people of the world. (14) It is a proof that we have passed from a state of spiritual death to one of spiritual life, if, instead of hating good people, we love them. Whereas, any one who does not love his brother, is evidently, as regards his soul, still in a state of death. (15) In fact, to feel hatred is the same thing as murder, for there is the disposition, though not the act; and we know that no murderer can have eternal life. (16) Our blessed Lord showed His love towards us, in laying down His life for us; and we ought, in like manner, to be ready to lay down our lives for our brethren. (17) But if any one has plenty of this world's goods, and sees a brother in want, and does nothing to relieve him, in what way does he imitate the love of God?

APPLICATION.

Love the peculiar mark of a Christian.

In the first part of this chapter we find the child of God described as one who cannot sin; that is,

not willingly; also, as bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. And now we are to consider that temper of mind, which, above all others, marks the Christian. It is love. If any one hate a fellow-creature, this is given as a sure sign of his being a child of the devil. Thus, whoever is conscious of harbouring such a feeling towards any living being, may be well assured that there is but a step between him and eternal misery. Reader, if this be your case, if you know that you do feel hatred towards any one, consider your own danger in consequence. Consider how you could bear everlasting burnings, which you know is the portion prepared for the devil and his angels; and with them you must expect to dwell, to all eternity, unless your heart is completely changed before you die.

Certainly, no one can turn his own heart from sin to holiness, and thus pass from death to life. It must be God's work to convert us, as much as to create us. But if any conviction of sin is now felt, if any sort of fear is excited in your mind respecting the consequences to follow from being at enmity with a fellow-creature, there is hope. Do not try to drive away these unpleasant thoughts, or to stifle the painful conviction of your danger; only let it induce you to cry aloud to God for mercy; and who can say but that your reading of this passage of Scripture may prove to be the turning-point in your life. A turn there must be, a complete one too, before a child of the devil can become a child of God, and an heir of eternal life. But if there is really a desire for this change, the change is, in fact, begun. If a sinner's eyes are opened to see and lament in

earnest the state of his heart, he is not altogether dead in sin. On the contrary, we may hope that the Holy Spirit has sown in him a seed, which will, in due time, spring up, and bear the fruits of a holy and religious life. But there are very many who, though they may not actually hate any of their fellow-creatures, are far enough from really loving them. There may be much unkindness, bitterness, and even spitefulness, without actual hatred; and thus people may flatter themselves that they are not the children of the devil, when, perhaps, they really are. But, Reader, judge yourself by this rule. Are you inclined to think that you may be excused, although you know that your feelings towards some of your fellow-creatures are the very opposite of love? Now, a child of God would not thus excuse himself. Though there may be much to blame and to dislike in the conduct and character of others, he knows that this is no excuse for unkindliness of feeling in himself; because we are to hate sin, but not the sinner; where there cannot be the love of approbation, there yet ought to be the love of compassion; therefore, the real Christian, instead of excusing himself, is deeply distressed and grieved at discovering the slightest symptom of envy, or enmity, or even the want of kindness and tenderness in himself, towards any one.

St. John here tells Christians not to wonder if they are hated for their very religion's sake, in which case their faith and patience will have a heavy trial. But God permits such trials, in order that His people may have an opportunity of letting their light shine before men. It is the will of Jesus Christ

that His disciples should be known, not only by their love, one to another, but by their forbearance, and long-suffering, towards those who are unkind to them. Reader, do you want a testimony to the truth of your religion? Do you desire to know of a certainty that you have passed from death unto life? Then look into your heart, and see if there be there a sincere love towards all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and also whether there is in you a spirit of long-suffering, kindness, and forbearance, towards all men.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 18 to 24.—With the tender feelings of a parent, St. John expresses himself when he thus writes, (18) My little children, let us not rest satisfied with mere expressions of love and kindness, but let us prove our love by our actions. (19) By this means we may know our religion to be of the right sort, and may, therefore, have confidence before God. (20) For, if conscience condemn us, we may be quite sure that God, who knows us better than we know ourselves, will also condemn us; (21) but if conscience does not condemn us, then we may confidently look up to God for His favor and blessing; (22) we may be sure that whatever we ask from Him we shall receive, because we are obedient to His commands, and do the things which are pleasing in His sight. (23) What He commands us to do is this, to have faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and to show it forth by loving one another. This is

His commandment; (24) and whoever keeps His commandments, dwells with God, and God with him; and we know that He dwells in us, by feeling that we are guided by the Holy Spirit, which is given to us by Him.

APPLICATION.

That we must carefully examine the ground, on which we build our assurance.

From this passage of Scripture we learn, that it is the blessed privilege of true Christians to have a comfortable assurance of their acceptance with God for Christ's sake. This is not a presumptuous feeling, as some people think. No; so far from it, it is what we all ought to desire, and labour to attain. We ought never to feel satisfied, until we have good grounds, on which to rest our full conviction, that God will not condemn us; and we may observe, that it is only those who are themselves without any foundation for confidence towards God, who censure it as presumption in others; for those who are really in a safe state, without being able to think so, are the very last to condemn that sort of confidence in others, which they earnestly long themselves to possess. It is, in fact, ignorance of the true nature of Christ's gospel, which makes people rest satisfied with anything short of it; and is, therefore, a very bad sign. But there is such a thing as a false confidence—and a very common thing too. From the want of self-examination, and from a very imperfect

knowledge of what the Scriptures say concerning those who are the heirs of salvation, many people comfort themselves with the cry of "peace, peace;" when it is too evident that their peace with God is not made. We know from Scripture, that at the last day many will appear before God under the full expectation of being admitted into heaven, who will find themselves excluded; they will stand at the door and knock, saying, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," but He will say, "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." We must, therefore, be most careful not to deceive ourselves with false hopes. We must consult our conscience anxiously, as those who desire to know the truth, and not as dissemblers, who wish to flatter themselves into comfort for the present. Let us remember this, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. He cannot be deceived. Let us, then, examine ourselves honestly, and see whether conscience will assure us, that we do earnestly desire to make God's commandments the rule of our lives, and that we have nothing so much at heart as to act in all respects according to His will. This is God's commandment, that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love one another. On these two points, faith and love, we must, therefore, press our inquiry. Do we so believe in Jesus Christ as to feel Him to be all in all to us? What exertions, what self-denials, do we make to prove our love and gratitude for what we profess to believe He has done for our souls? How far can we appeal to the Searcher of hearts, and say—Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that above all things I desire to love and serve Thee? If, then, we flatter ourselves that Christ is our all in

all, let us next inquire how this faith in Christ acts upon our intercourse with our fellow-creatures. This will be a trying point with some people, for they may think they love Christ who died to save them, while they know very well that their poor sinful fellow-creatures (full of infirmities like themselves) they do not love. They have not learned to follow the example of Him who laid down His life for His enemies; and, therefore, their conscience, if allowed to speak the truth, cannot but condemn them. But if on this point, also, a well-examined conscience should speak peace, if it tells us that we do make it our constant endeavour, with prayer and watchfulness, to exercise all long-suffering, gentleness, and kindness, and that, as we have opportunity, we do good unto all men; if thus our hearts condemn us not, then may we have confidence towards God. We know that He dwells in us, by His having produced in us tempers and dispositions which are contrary to nature. It is not nature, but grace, which leads us to use self-denial for the sake of others; and enables us to be kind to those who are not kind to us, and to prefer the future and unseen world to that which is now present, and which is felt by most people to be of so much importance. These are feelings which we know are wrought in us by the Spirit, which He has given us. And oh! what a happiness to be able thus to feel assured, that we are among the redeemed of the Lord! For then we enjoy in this life the comfort of knowing, that whatever we ask of God, which would be really profitable, He will give us; and that all things, whether for the present joyous or grievous, will in the end

work for good. And as to our future prospect, it is nothing less than this, that after a few short years of conflict with sin and sorrow, we shall come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon our heads; we shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.

PRAYER.

O Lord God, I do humbly desire to adore that infinite goodness which has opened unto us a way, by which the sons of men may be made the sons of God. And I earnestly pray that of Thy great mercy I may be numbered among them. Grant me the blessed hope that when Christ shall appear, I may both see Him as He is, and be made like Him in glory. And may this hope stir me up to strive with all diligence to purify myself, even as Thou art pure. Give me grace firmly to believe in Christ, who was manifested to take away my sins; and grant that I may so truly abide in Him, as never more willingly to commit any sin; but on the contrary, grant that by hating and striving against all manner of evil, and labouring to bring forth the fruits of righteousness, it may be manifest that I am indeed born of God. Most especially I pray for a heart filled with love towards all my fellow-creatures, that thus I may know that I have passed from death unto life, because I love the brethren. I beseech Thee to take from me all bitterness of feeling towards all those who may at any time have been unkind to me. Enable me heartily to forgive all my enemies, and to be always ready to

do all the good that I can, according to the example of Him who laid down His life for me. Mercifully grant that the Holy Spirit may ever be with me, to enable me in all things to walk according to Thy commandments. Be pleased to hear these my imperfect prayers, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

CHAPTER IV.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 1 to 6.—There were in the days of the Apostles many false teachers, pretending to be guided by inspiration from God. St. John here warns his disciples to be on their guard against them. He says, (1) My beloved brethren, do not suppose that every one who professes to be guided by the Spirit of God is to be believed. You must examine into the nature of what they teach, and see whether it agrees with what you know of God; for there are many false prophets now in the world. (2) I will tell you how you may know who are guided by the Holy Spirit. Every one who teaches that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world for our sakes, and took on Him man's nature, you may feel sure is taught of God. (3) But every one who does not hold this doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ is certainly not to be received as coming from God. On the contrary, you must consider that such an one

is under the guidance of that anti-christian spirit, of which you have, in times past, been told that it should come; and now it is actually in the world. (4) But you who, with a child-like spirit, have received the truth from God, can effectually resist such false teachers, because you have Him on your side who is of greater power and might than any one in the world. (5) These false teachers being worldly-minded men, naturally teach such doctrines as are agreeable to the world; and therefore they get a ready hearing. (6) But we teach the doctrines of God; and he who really understands anything of God, listens to us; but he who is not under the teaching of God's Spirit, will not attend to us. Hereby we know who are led by the Spirit of God, and who by the spirit of error.

APPLICATION.

The way to be kept from error is to have a sincere love for truth.

It is, indeed, a most distressing thing to be obliged to doubt, whether those who profess to be guided by God's Holy Spirit are so or not. But experience proves, that the warning here given by St. John is as needful now, as it was then, and even more so; for now the variety of false teachers is endless. St. John only mentions one sort of error, that which especially prevailed in his day: viz., denying the fact that Jesus Christ had ever taken upon Himself the nature of man. This is an error which has now passed away. But others equally antichristian

abound among us. Some deny the divinity of Christ, and some offer to departed saints and the Virgin Mary the honour, which is due only to our blessed Saviour. And of late years there have been Irvingites, and Mormonites, and other deceivers, pretending to prophesy and to work miracles, in proof of a new revelation from God. Now, whenever such delusions as these are brought before us, it is our duty to remember that God, in His Word, has forewarned us of false prophets, in order that we may avoid them. And observe how it is that St. John tells us errors of every kind are to be resisted and overcome. Not by much learning, not by the power of argument; but by a child-like spirit, which is willing and anxious to be taught of God. Those who study the Bible in humility, and sincerely pray to be guided into all truth by the Spirit of truth, may feel satisfied that they will be able to overcome all such enemies, not through their own strength; but because greater is He that is with them, than he that is in the world. All false teachers have some worldly end in view; and, generally, they know how to please the taste of worldly people. But if we have no desire to indulge in any wrong propensity, but sincerely love the truth, we may be happy in the belief that God will not suffer us to fall a prey to any of the many and sad errors, which so prevail among us.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 7 to 12.—As St. John had said that those only who were of God would listen to the truth, so now

he goes on to show us, how we must prove ourselves to be the children of God. He says, (7) Let us love one another, because the spirit of love is that which cometh from God ; and every one who is of a loving spirit, thereby proves himself born of God, and shows that he understands what it is which is pleasing to the Almighty. (8) But he that does not love his brother can know nothing of God ; for God is love itself. (9) The love of God was in a most especial manner shown to us by the sending of His Son into the world, that we, through Him, might have eternal life. (10) This is love, indeed ; for observe, we did not love God. Quite the reverse ; and yet he did so love us, as to send His Son to make atonement for our sins. (11) Surely, then, if God showed such love towards us, His rebellious creatures, we ought to prove our gratitude by loving each other. (12) No man living hath seen, or can see God. There can be no visible communication or expression of personal feeling towards the Almighty ; but if we truly love one another, we know that God dwells in us, and that His love towards us is producing in us its perfect work.

APPLICATION.

Love towards our brethren is the way, in which we must prove our love to God.

Everybody will agree in saying, that love is a delightful thing ; that if we really all loved one another, as we love ourselves, and God above all

things, this world would be a paradise in comparison to what it is. And no wonder that love is such a blessed thing, since we are here told that "love is of God." It comes from God, as His best gift to His own children. In fact, it is the proof of our being born again of the Holy Ghost. For if we are born of God, we shall, of course, be like God; but if we are without love, we have no resemblance to Him; and therefore, whatever we may think about it now, we shall find at the last great day, that He will not own us for His children. But suppose that we have some love towards God in us, just enough to make us wish that we had more, what shall we do to obtain this blessed spirit? Of course, the first thing to be done, when we want anything, is to ask for it. And, therefore, we must make it the constant subject of our prayer, that our love may abound more and more. But another thing which we can do and ought to do, to increase our love to God, is to dwell much upon the subject of His love to us. Love always shows itself by actions; and what could God have done more to prove His love for us, His sinful creatures, than by sending His Son to suffer in our stead. It would have been wonderful love in God, if He had sent His Son to die for those who really loved Him, and were grieved to the heart for having offended Him. But this was not the case. Quite the reverse. There was no love at all on our side. Nothing to call forth any feelings of interest for us; and this it is which so increases the wonder of God's love toward us. Surely we cannot reflect upon such a subject as this, without being stirred up to feelings of gratitude and affection. And then, if

our hearts are in any degree properly affected with the greatness of God's love to us, we shall, of course, feel a wish to show our love to Him in return. Now this can only be done in our conduct one to another; for we have no direct way of approaching that invisible Being, who is known to us only by faith. But He has fully explained what He requires of us, and what it is which is needful to prove, that we have accepted and benefitted by His offers of mercy. If we are truly thankful to God for sending His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him; then, to show this, we must love each other. And truly, if we do not love one another, we have no life in us. Christ for us has died in vain. But if we do constantly strive to prove our love to God, by loving our fellow-creatures, then we know that God dwelleth in us. Though no man hath seen God at any time, yet happy experience will make His presence to be felt, and His love will be perfected in us. Not that we are to understand by this expression that human beings can ever be perfect in the measure of their love, but that this is the sort of love, which is perfect in its kind. Only, let us watch and pray that, as God so loved us, we also may have grace to love one another.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 13 to 21.—In the 12th verse it is written, "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us;" but we must not suppose that God dwells in us because He is pleased with our loving disposition. To prevent

this mistake St. John goes on to say, (13) we know that we dwell in God, and God in us, because we have that love to others, which must be the work of His Holy Spirit. (14) Besides which we have witnessed with our own eyes, and now tell it to others, that God the Father sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world; (15) and whoever heartily believes this, has another proof that God dwells in him, and he in God. (16) Truly we have known and felt the wonders of God's love to us. In fact God is love itself; and where love is, there is God. (17) And observe, this is one of the most blessed effects of love, that it gives us boldness in thinking of the great judgment day, because we feel that now the image of God is stamped upon us, and therefore He will not then disown us. (18) Besides, where there is real love to God, there can be no fear; for fear is a most distressing thing; and it is impossible that we can perfectly love God, and yet stand in dread of Him. (19) Thus you see, that our love to Him arises from His first having loved us. (20) But suppose any one should say, I love God, and yet is living with feelings of hatred to some fellow-creature, that man is a liar; for it stands to reason, that if he does not love his fellow-creatures whom he has seen, he cannot love God whom he has not seen. (21) Besides, this is God's command, that every one who pretends to love Him, must prove it by loving all his fellow-creatures.

APPLICATION.

How we may be able to meet God in judgment without dismay.

That there is a judgment to come, few will deny; and surely those who think at all must wish to know how it will fare with them in that day. Reader, is this a subject of interest to you? Do you ever find a quiet time for reflection, and inquiry as to what is likely to be your everlasting destiny? If you do (and nothing is more important) the passage of Scripture before us will greatly assist you. It is not to be supposed, that any one will be called to share the society of God and His holy Angels in heaven, whose temper of mind is altogether contrary to the mind of God. Even in this world, there is no happiness to be found in associating with people who think and feel quite differently to ourselves; and it would be so also in heaven; we should not be happy there, if we had not something of a heavenly mind. Now mark what is the peculiar character of God; it is put before us in three words, "God is love." The first question, therefore, to ask ourselves when wishing to know how we shall fare in the judgment day, is this: Am I earnestly cultivating the spirit of love? Our dispositions may be naturally more or less sweet, but that proves nothing. The Gospel requires of us such love towards our enemies, such forbearance and long-suffering towards the froward, and such self-denial in the constant endeavour to make others happy, as can never be in accordance

with the natural feelings of any child of Adam. All this must be the work of the Holy Spirit; and if we can truly say, that such a temper of mind is gradually being formed more and more within us, we may surely believe that God now dwelleth in us, and we in God; and, therefore, we may also hope to dwell with Him in heaven hereafter. But the work of the Spirit is never perfected in this world, and therefore, can give us comfort only as connected with the finished work of Christ. It is faith in Him, working by love, which must give us boldness in the day of judgment. Can we, then, like St. John, say, "We have seen, and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." Not that with our bodily eyes we can see Him, but have we seen Him with the eye of faith? Can we, with our whole heart, most thankfully bear testimony, that Jesus Christ is both the Son of God, and the Saviour of our souls? Then there need be no fear, and, indeed, there will be no fear; for if we really love God, because we know that He first loved us, our feelings of love towards Him will be such as to cast out all fear. It is those who live in a great measure indifferent to the love of God, who tremble at the thought of death and judgment. And well they may; for, while to believers "God is love," to His enemies "He is a consuming fire." It would seem almost impossible to imagine, that any one could so deceive himself, as to think that he loved God, while living at enmity with a fellow-creature; but the devil does so blind the eyes of some men, that they can fancy anything, and they dream that they are going to heaven, while every step they take is leading them down to hell.

Oh ! let this sad truth teach us to examine ourselves most carefully, and to be sure that we judge of our faith by its fruits. It is not enough to say, we love God : we must prove it, by loving our fellow-creatures.

PRAYER.

O Lord God, because there are now so many and grievous errors taught and believed in the world, I most humbly beseech Thee to guide me into all truth, by the help of Thy Holy Spirit, and to preserve me by Thy Almighty aid from the power of Antichrist. I pray for a truly humble and teachable mind. Grant that I may never trust in myself, or in the teaching of man ; but knowing that Thou, Lord, art greater in power and might than all my enemies in earth or hell, I desire entirely to trust in Thee for help to overcome them all. And thus, though weak and ignorant in myself, I humbly hope that by honouring Thee, and depending alone upon Thee, I may be enabled to know the spirit of truth from the spirit of error. Above all things I pray for the spirit of love, for Thou, O God, art love itself ; and no one who is without love in the heart, can really be born of Thee. O Lord, I beseech Thee, assist me to meditate frequently upon Thy love, especially upon the way in which Thou didst manifest it towards us, in the sending of Thy Son into the world, that we might live through Him. And as Thou hast loved me, so help me to love my fellow-creatures. O Lord, I pray that the Holy Spirit may be given to me to change and purify my corrupt nature,

and that thus I may know that Thou, Lord, dwellest in me. Grant unto me that perfect love towards Thee, which casteth out fear, so that I may have boldness in the great judgment-day. I humbly desire, and pray, that by all means I may be found walking according to that command which we have received from Thee, that we both love Thee, and love our brother also. Mercifully hear, and answer these prayers, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

CHAPTER V.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 1 to 5. St. John, in the last chapter, had been describing the character of a real child of God; and continuing the same subject, he says, (1) Whoever believes in Jesus Christ, as the promised Saviour of the world, is born of God; and every one who loves God, must love those who are thus born of Him. (2) And the proof that we do love God's children in a proper manner, is to be found in our so loving God as to keep His commandments. (3) For the way to show our love to God is by keeping His commandments cheerfully, and not thinking them burdensome. (4) And another thing that proves a person to be born of God, is that he has overcome the love of the world. And that which enables us to overcome the love of the world is our faith. (5) Who is there that ever overcomes the natural love, which we all have for worldly things, but those who are real believers in Christ, the Son of God?

APPLICATION.

The proofs of a new birth.

Among all the interesting and important discourses of our blessed Lord, there is not one sentence which strikes upon the heart with deeper solemnity, than those words addressed by Him to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John iii. 3). It is very evident that there is something awfully important in these words. It is true they refer to a mystery so deep, that the utmost learning of man cannot fathom it; still they have a practical meaning, which it must be necessary for us to understand, because it is so solemnly declared that, unless we personally experience the truth they contain, we cannot be saved. Nicodemus, in a caviling spirit, as it would seem, asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" Our Lord, in reply, showed him that the new birth, of which He was speaking, was a great change to take place not in our bodies, but in our souls, and pressed upon him a second time the absolute necessity of this change, using again those solemn words, "Verily, verily." Can any thing then be more important than to inquire what is meant by being "born again," or, as St. John expresses it, "born of God." But too many of us, like Nicodemus, are apt to put away from themselves the practical importance of the sub-

ject, by discussing those difficult questions, when, and by what means, this change takes place. It may be the duty of learned men to consider these points, but let us rather attend to the great duty of applying to our own good, the light which St. John throws upon the subject, in the passage before us. Observe, then, that he says, all are born of God who believe that Jesus is the Christ. The word Christ means anointed, or set apart, and properly authorised to fulfil some particular office. Now, the office which our Lord undertook to fulfil, when He came upon earth, was that of being the Saviour of mankind. And those who so feel their need of a Saviour, as thankfully to receive Him as such, with a true and sincere faith, are born of God. For, observe, it is elsewhere written, "No man can say that Jesus is the Christ, but by the Holy Ghost." We may, indeed, say the words with our lips, but to say them in truth, as the conviction of our own hearts, is what no one can do but by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The important question, then, for us to ask, is this, Can I, in sincerity and truth, say, that I feel the blessedness of knowing that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of my soul? And lest we should make a mistake in answering this question, St. John shows us what are the effects of this saving faith. In the first place, it produces both love to God, and love to the children of God. These two things are so interwoven, that we cannot love God without loving those who are His spiritually begotten children, neither can we love them after a Christian spirit, without first loving God; so that we have to consider, not only whether we are truly affectionate and kind to

our fellow-creatures, but also whether this springs from a feeling of love to God as their Father and our Father, or only from the effects of a natural affection. Of this we must judge by considering whether we are earnestly seeking to comply with all God's commands, not only this of loving our fellow-creatures, but all His other laws. If we are real children of God, if we are born of the Spirit, and are true believers in Jesus as the Christ, we shall feel that His laws are not grievous, we shall have pleasure in keeping them, just as we feel the greatest satisfaction in doing any thing we can to please a human being whom we affectionately love. In the second place, St. John says, "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." Our thoughts, feelings, and affections, are naturally so much engaged by the passing concerns of this world, that nothing but a true and lively faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ can enable us to resist the influence, which the world has over us. Before we shall be induced to resist our natural inclinations, and sacrifice present ease and comfort at the calls of duty, we must be well assured that these self-denying exertions will be for our gain in the end. This is what every one does feel sure of, who really believes that Jesus is the Christ. It stands to reason, that the Lord of heaven and earth would not have taken upon Him our nature, to live a life of suffering and die upon the cross, if the soul which He came to save had not been very precious; if the punishment of sin had not been very dreadful. The real believer feels the full force of this reasoning. He is thoroughly convinced that nothing is of equal value with the soul,

and is therefore ready to make any sacrifice which is necessary, in order to secure its eternal happiness. Thus the faith which receives Jesus as the Saviour of the soul overcomes the love of the world, seeing that the world has nothing to offer which can be weighed against the joys of heaven, and compensate for the torments of hell. Moreover, those who have been brought to feel the preciousness of Christ, and to hate the sins which caused His sufferings, seek, and find in Him, the strength which they require for fighting against the devil, the world, and the flesh. These enemies are not to be overcome by reason only. They are too mighty for us, if we struggle with them alone. But he that believeth that Jesus is the Christ is not alone. By faith we become one with Christ, and Christ with us; and through Him we are made more than conquerors; so that it may well be said, "This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith." And now let each of us inquire, whether our faith has been thus manifested by giving us the victory over the love of the world. Are we living as strangers and pilgrims upon earth, having our chief anxieties engaged upon the concerns of another and a better world? Are we watching and striving against sin, and gradually overcoming the power of sin in us, by the strength which is given us from above? If, then, we have these proofs of real faith, we may enjoy the comfort of thinking, that we have Scriptural authority for believing that we are born again, and may rejoice in the blessed hope, that being now the true children of God, we shall hereafter enter into that kingdom of glory, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore. Amen.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 6 to 12.—St. John is speaking of Jesus Christ, when he says, (6) This is He who came into the world, that He might redeem mankind by water and blood; that is to say, He came to cleanse us *from* sin, and to offer an atonement *for* sin. Observe, He came not with water only, but with water and blood; it was not enough that sin should be cleansed away, it was needful also that by the shedding of His most precious blood, sin should be atoned for; and to the truth of this, the Spirit bears witness; the Spirit being truth itself. (7) Moreover, there are in heaven three that bear witness to this; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. (8) And there are three witnesses on earth to the truth of Christ's Divinity; the Spirit, which, visibly descending upon Him at His baptism, accompanied Him through life, enabling Him to work miracles; and the water, and the blood, which flowed from His side in death, showing forth that sanctification and justification, which He procures for His people; and these all agree in bearing one and the same testimony. (9) Now, if for the confirmation of any fact, we think the testimony of three human beings is sufficient, surely we must receive with greater confidence the testimony of God; and such is His testimony concerning His Son, Jesus Christ. (10) Besides this, any man who really believes in Jesus Christ, has an inward witness, which assures him of the truth; but whoever does not believe in Him, charges God with a lie; because he

does not receive as truth, what God has said concerning His Son. (11) And this is what He has said, namely, that He has given to us eternal life; and that it is given through His Son. He that has faith in the Son of God, has a life which will endure for ever; and he that hath not faith in Him, is without that life.

APPLICATION.

We must be conscious that salvation is a difficult work, or we shall not be saved.

It frequently happens that some bad illness, or other alarming circumstance, causes an ungodly man to tremble; then perhaps he may be so far convinced of the evil of sin, as to make the resolution that he will turn over a new leaf, and reform his character. But such a resolution, formed in his own strength, only shows his great ignorance. He has yet to learn how utterly hopeless are the efforts of man against the malice of Satan. He has yet to learn what an evil and a bitter thing sin is. So bitter and so deadly, that even the cleansing of the soul by God would not suffice. It needed something more than this to save man from ruin. To set us free from condemnation nothing less would do than the sacrifice of God Himself. He took our nature that He might die upon the cross, because nothing else would atone for our guilt. When we have duly considered this fact, we shall surely feel it most awful to observe the coolness and indifference, with which mankind in

general regard sin. Oh ! how little do many among us understand or value the effort, which God has made to deliver us from the curse of sin ! Supposing that God had left His throne on high to sojourn upon earth for several years, in order to set us an example of holiness, and thus to lead to a change in our conduct and character, should we not have thought this a most wonderful instance of condescension, and a most extraordinary act of mercy in the great Maker of the world ? But what would that have been in comparison with what has really taken place ? That would only have been, as it were, coming by water. But Jesus Christ came not by water only, but by water and blood—aye, by blood. He shed His blood in our cause. A mere change for the better in the character of man would not do. We could not be saved without some satisfaction being rendered to the majesty of Almighty God, for the guilt of man's rebellion. And in the shedding of His precious blood, Jesus Christ did make an atonement all-sufficient. But if this love be counted as nothing, and overlooked by the ungrateful beings for whom He died, what then ? What mercy can they expect who have thus despised His love ? Can we wonder if a ten-fold vengeance overtakes the guilty wretch who talks about turning from his sins, and becoming a good man, by the mere power of his own unassisted efforts ? Just as if it were the easiest thing in the world to make his peace with God ; with nothing to offer as an atonement for the past, or any merit to depend upon beyond his own. Ah ! Satan has indeed blinded the eyes of men who can think thus lightly of sin. Nothing can be more clear than that eternal

life must come to us through Jesus Christ, or we perish. In order to be delivered from sin, and be saved, it is necessary that we should understand and feel the difficulty of the work. We must be made perfectly sensible that it is a work far above out of our own power. When the mind is thoroughly humbled, and brought low under a sense of guilt, when we despair of help from any other than the blessed Saviour, then we feel Him to be indeed truly precious. Then it is delightful to be assured, that our salvation has been accomplished for us, that eternal life is the gift of God, for His Son's sake. Eternal life is not to be purchased. This must be thoroughly understood. He who thinks to offer God anything in part of payment, refuses the offer of life in the only way in which it is to be had, that is, as a *gift*. This is humiliating to man's pride. But pride must be humbled ere ever one sinner can be saved. There are two questions, then, which it becomes most needful that we should ask : 1st, Are we so convinced of the desperate nature of sin, as to be hopeless of saving our own souls? 2nd, Have we so cared about the salvation of our souls, as really to believe with joy and thankfulness, that God has given to us eternal life through His Son? And mark this, "he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." The effect of really believing that we are saved by Christ is so powerful, that we cannot help knowing it. It fills the heart with such love and gratitude to the Saviour, and such a hatred of sin, that a change takes place in our whole conduct and character, such as cannot be mistaken. Christ then becomes all in all to us. His will and His honour

are then consulted before anything else. He is become to us more precious than the whole world. If we are conscious of thus loving Christ, and holding Him as our first and best treasure, we are safe; for he that hath the Son (that is, hath faith in Him) hath eternal life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 13 to 21.—What St. John had written was addressed to real believers in Christ, and he says, (13) Thus have I written, in order that you may know for a certainty, that you have a life begun in you which will last for ever and ever, and that your confidence in Christ may be strengthened and confirmed. (14) And observe this, our confidence in Him is so very great, that we are sure of His listening favourably to whatever petitions we make, which are according to His will. (15) And if He hears us favourably, we may be sure of receiving whatsoever we have asked; for (16) if at any time we see a Christian brother overcome by temptation, and falling into grievous, but not deadly sin, we may ask, and believe that, under these circumstances, our prayers will be heard, and made effectual for the preservation of spiritual life in the soul of our erring brother. But there are some sins which are fatal. I do not say that prayer in that case will avail. (17) All unrighteousness is sin, but there are degrees, and some sins are not altogether of a hopeless kind. (18) We know that any one who is really born of God does not sin willingly, but, being begotten of the Holy Spirit, he has

strength to fight against sin, and the devil cannot prevail against him. By this victory over sin we know that we are the children of God, while the world in general lies sunk in sin. (20) We know that the Son of God has been upon earth. We have had our understandings enlightened to receive aright the knowledge of the true God, and we are united by faith to Him, even Jesus Christ. This is the true God, whom to know is life eternal. (21) My dear children, beware of worshipping any other.

APPLICATION.

The efficacy of intercessory prayer.

Any mind which is fully awake to the great value of the soul, and deeply impressed with the difference between heaven and hell, must be anxious, above all things, to feel that heaven is secured, and that there is no just ground to fear an eternity of woe. It is only wonderful, that everybody does not feel this anxiety. But for those who do feel it, what a blessing to be told, that there is no necessity for us to pass our whole life in doubt upon this subject, but that we may now know whether or not we have eternal life, without waiting for death and judgment to decide the mighty question. St. John says that he writes on purpose to tell us, that we may have this satisfaction. Nevertheless, we often hear people giving it as their opinion, that no one ought to feel any confidence on the subject of their soul's salvation.

They dare to set themselves in opposition to St. John, and seem to think they know better than the Holy Ghost, by whom he wrote. Such is the presumption of many persons, who think themselves very humble for not presuming to hope that they are going to heaven. At the same time, they would be exceedingly angry with any one, who should dare to breathe a thought, that perhaps they were going to hell. Those who can live satisfied without knowing that they have eternal life, seldom consider what is the alternative. They never allow their minds to face the awful truth, that, if they have not eternal life, they are doomed to eternal death. So, though they have no comfortable hope of going to heaven, they have not the slightest idea of going to hell. Such careless concern upon the subject of eternal life or death does seem most strange, and is really very awful. Reader, have you made it your business to clear up this great question? Have you seriously inquired to which end you are travelling? Since you may know the truth, you surely ought to know it, on such an important subject. And mark this; it generally happens that those persons who say that they do not know that they have eternal life, make no mistake; for the fact is, that in most cases they really do not believe in the Son of God; and, therefore, they certainly have not that eternal life, which is the gift of God to those only who do believe in Him. They may believe with the head, but not with the heart; and here lies all the difference between a vague hope, and a joyful certainty. Those who have head knowledge may say, I believe that Jesus died to take away the sins of the world, and therefore I

hope to benefit by His death. I hope His blood may answer for my guilt. But one who has heart knowledge can say, I believe that Jesus died for me. I have felt the burden of sin, and by deep repentance and lively faith in Him have found not only pardon and peace, but liberty and power to run with zeal a new and holier course. And, with humble gratitude, such an one may add, "I know that I have eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Now, if we are happy enough to possess this consciousness of personal safety, we are encouraged by St. John to indulge great confidence in the efficacy of our prayers for others. And this is a subject in which our happiness is deeply concerned. The joys and sorrows of real Christians are very different from those of other men. To them the sight of sin in a fellow-creature is become the source of great grief; and it might seem almost a hopeless grief, since, however much we may wish, we cannot turn the heart of another, or give a ransom for his soul. But here we are told that we may ask of God for others this greatest of all mercies, even the life of the soul, and believe that He will hear us favourably, and grant us our petition, if it be according to His will. True, there are some sins, for which our prayers will not avail. The season of repentance may be past, and then the wages of sin, which is eternal death, must be dealt out. But as we do not know exactly what is sin unto death, and what is not, we may always pray with hope. And when the conduct of those we love is disheartening, but not apparently desperate, all we need is more faith to believe the promise, which God has made of hearing and answer-

ing prayer. The want of faith hinders the efficacy of many a Christian's prayer. It is therefore most desirable, that we should dwell frequently on the encouragement held out to us in this portion of Scripture, with regard to the benefits to be derived from prayer in general, and more especially with reference to our intercessions in behalf of others.

PRAYER.

Gracious and merciful God, I humbly confess that I am weak, sinful, and ignorant, and of myself can know nothing, and do nothing that is right. But I earnestly pray Thee to teach me by Thy Holy Spirit, and to enable me rightly to believe that Jesus is the Christ. I do heartily desire to be among the number of Thy true children. I pray for a heart to love Thee. I pray for help in my endeavours to keep all Thy commandments; and especially, I pray to be enabled to keep the law of love towards all my fellow-creatures. And O Lord God, I pray for the increase of faith. I do believe, but O help Thou mine unbelief. Grant that, through faith, I may have victory in my endeavours to overcome the love of the world, that I may thus be enabled to rejoice in the blessed hope, that I am indeed born of Thee. Impress deeply on my mind how evil and bitter a thing sin is, which nothing but the shedding of Christ's blood could wash out. Make me very earnest in seeking after all the benefits of His death, as represented by water and blood, that I may obtain both the pardon of my sins, and the purifying of my

heart, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Teach me to believe, with all joy and gratitude, the record which Thou hast given unto us of Thy Son. And grant that this record, being received into my own heart by faith, I may know that Thou hast given me eternal life through Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. I humbly desire to thank Thee for the blessed privilege we possess of praying one for another, in the confidence that, when we ask anything which is according to Thy will, we have our petitions granted. Enable me to use this privilege more fully and frequently, and to pray more earnestly for the teaching of the Holy Spirit in every heart, that all may know that the Son of God is come, and may have an understanding so to know Him, that they may obtain eternal life. Through Him I offer up these prayers; and to Him, with Thee, O Father and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SECOND EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN.

EXPLANATION.

VERSE 1 to 3.—The Apostle John outlived all the other Apostles ; and it must therefore be in reference to his great age that he calls himself “the elder.” The term elder is used by St. Peter of ministers generally ; but here St. John, without mentioning his name, only describes himself in his address as (1) The elder, unto the elect lady. No name is given to her to whom he writes, but he speaks of her as one of the chosen of God. And addressing her and her children, he says, I love you for the truth’s sake, which you hold ; and it is not only I who love you, but all love you who have known the truth. (2) We love you for the sake of that true faith, in which we all agree, and which we shall for ever hold. (3) And we earnestly hope that grace, mercy, and peace, may abound towards you from God the Father, and from His Son Jesus Christ, and this we say in all sincerity.

APPLICATION.

On the blessedness of Christian friendship.

We have here a beautiful instance of Christian love. There is no affection so strong, so pure, so lasting, as that which springs from a oneness of heart on the subject of true religion. For those who hold the truth stand on a firm foundation; for the truth never changes. It is like God Himself, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And those who hold it are all one in Christ Jesus. There is nothing more distressing in this world of change than the alteration of feeling which so often takes place among friends. When the heart that we once fondly fancied was all our own, has become cold and dead towards us, we may well feel sad indeed. But those who love each other as St. John loved this elect lady, because of the truth, have no such change to fear. Their's is a love to last for ever. It will be found again even after death itself has done its worst, and when time shall be no more. It is true that we cannot tell with the same certainty that St. John did, who are elect, and who are not; but if we choose for our friends those who seem, as far as we can judge, to be the true servants of God, and value them for their religion's sake, we have the best foundation we can have, for believing that our friendships will be secure, and not only that they will be lasting, but also profitable. We see how earnestly St. John desired for his friend the best gifts; and if we have friends, who

we can believe pray for us, we may the more confidently hope, that the grace and peace, which comes from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, will rest upon us. This letter standing, as it does, in the inspired volume of God, is not to be read simply as a specimen of kind and affectionate correspondence, but as containing lessons of instruction and guidance for ourselves. While then we read and admire the deep interest the Apostle took in this Christian lady, at such an advanced period of life, as gave him a right to be called "the Elder," let us learn to imitate his example in interesting ourselves about the spiritual welfare of others. Old age is too apt not only to deaden the affections, and dull the intellect, but even to produce much fretfulness and inconsiderate selfishness. Let us then earnestly seek for the continual indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and we may then humbly trust that His invigorating influences will more than counteract the decay of nature, and by His help we may thus hope to be made useful in edifying and comforting others, even to our last sigh, however far advanced in age it may please God to carry us.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 4 to 8.—After the usual address and benediction, with which most of the sacred epistles commence, St. John proceeds thus: (4) It gave me the greatest pleasure to find, in the intercourse I have lately had with some of your children, that they are continuing to walk according to the true and holy

doctrines of that religion, which we have received from God. (5) And now, lady, I hope you will allow me to remind you of that which is no new commandment, but which we have been taught from the very beginning, namely, the duty of loving one another. (6) And this love, which I so recommend to you, is best proved by walking in all respects according to the known will of God. Now the divine will is, that you should hold, in all sincerity, the true doctrines of the Gospel, as they have been taught to you by us, the Apostles of Christ. (7) For many false teachers are now abroad in the world, who deny the fact that Jesus Christ took upon Him our human nature. Be assured that every one who so speaks is to be avoided as a deceiver, and regarded as an antichrist. (8) Watch carefully then your own religious opinions, that they be not influenced by such false teachers, lest all the labour which we have bestowed in instructing you in the truth, should, in the end, be lost. But rather let us have our reward in seeing you now bring forth the fruits of holiness, and in sharing with you hereafter eternal joy.

APPLICATION.

The importance of watching against false doctrine.

It is very evident that St. John's object in writing this letter, was to put his very excellent disciple upon her guard against some antichristian doctrine, which began to spread even before the first teachers of the

Gospel had departed from the world. The more highly St. John had reason to think of this lady, the more anxiety he felt, lest she should, by any means, be led astray, knowing, as he did, that the more any one is advanced in their Christian course, the more earnestly will the devil strive to effect their ruin. And perhaps it is from not remembering this, that so many who have for a time run well in their Christian course, and given great promise of excellence, afterwards fall away in the most deplorable manner. We are all too apt to forget the words of caution written by St. Paul, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. x. 12.) And this is the lesson which we have to learn from the portion of Scripture now before us. However well we may have been taught the truth, however firm we may fancy ourselves to be in regard to it, constant prayer is needful, that we may be preserved steadfast in it. And unless we do feel some anxiety, and fear of being misled, the probability is that we shall fall into some fatal snare. Our safety depends upon our watchfulness, and cannot be secured without it. But here we may remark, that St. John urges this watchfulness upon the lady to whom he writes on two grounds, distinct from her own personal salvation. He does not say, beware of false doctrine, lest you lose your own soul, that of course is implied; but he says, if you wish to keep the law of love, the very chief part of Christian duty, beware of false doctrine; and again he says, if you would not disappoint us of our reward, who have laboured so much for your good, beware of false doctrine. So then it is not only ourselves that we should consider

in this matter, but also the evil that we may do to others. Those especially who hold an influential position in society should remember, that they have much to answer for, in regard to the way in which their example tells upon others. But, in fact, we have all much to answer for in this respect; for, let our situation in life be what it may, we cannot help influencing the minds of others, either for good or ill. We may at first sight think it strange, perhaps, that the Apostle should say, that love to our fellow-creatures was best proved by holding fast the true doctrines of our religion; but we may easily see that there can be no true love in leading a friend to embrace such wrong doctrine as must in the end effect the ruin of the soul; and, though we do it ignorantly, still, if we have any right feelings of love for others, we must tremble at the thought of being in the most distant manner the cause of their endless misery. Therefore, says St. John, "This is love, that we walk after God's commandments;" this is the truest, best way of being kind to others, that we set them a good example, that we lead them in the right way; and if we have heard the truth, and received it, as this lady had done, then it is the commandment of God that we maintain it pure unto the end, to the joy and satisfaction of those who have instructed us, and taken an interest in our spiritual welfare. There cannot be a greater grief for any minister of the Gospel, or for any pious friend who has laboured to instruct others, than to see, in the end, that their endeavours have been of no avail; that where they had sown wheat, an enemy has sown tares. And yet this is but too often the fatal end of

some promising young people, because when they go **out** into the midst of an ensnaring world they forget the solemn injunction here given, "look to yourselves." They forget to watch, and so fall into the hands of the devil, who always has a variety of deceivers and antichrists about in the world ready to betray unwary souls. Oh Reader, are you looking well to yourself, lest you fall a prey to their devices? Remember there is really nothing of so much consequence to yourself, as that you be found walking in the commandments of God. Should death now strike you, how would it find you? Would it find you truly a follower of Christ, or antichrist? It is one thing or the other with every one of us; we are all hastening on to heaven or hell; and we had better take time to consider the matter, and see which way we are going. Let us never forget those solemn words of our blessed Saviour, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

EXPLANATION.

Verse 9 to 13.—The false teachers, against whom St. John is warning the lady whom he addresses, erred from the truth, in consequence of a proud imagination, which led them to think themselves fit judges of what it was right and proper for the Almighty to do. They supposed that it was inconsistent with the glory of God the Father, that His Son Jesus Christ should be clothed in human flesh; in opposition to which vain notion, St. John says, (9) Whoever sins by denying the true doctrine

of Christ, has no true knowledge of God the Father. But he that firmly holds the truth concerning Jesus Christ, has the favour and blessing of both the Father and the Son. (10) Observe then, if any one comes to you who does not hold the true doctrine concerning Christ, have nothing to do with him; do not receive him into your house, or give him any encouragement. (11) For if, in any way, you sanction his proceedings, you share with him the guilt of his evil deeds. (12) And now I will conclude, for, having much to say to you, I will write no more, but hope to come and speak with you face to face; which will, I am sure, be a real joy to both of us. (13) The children of your dear sister, one of the chosen of the Lord, desire to send you messages of love.

APPLICATION.

The great importance of rightly understanding the doctrine of Christ.

It does seem strange indeed, that any one should think of being wise above what is written; or of knowing anything of God, beyond what they are told in Scripture! It only proves with what amazing pride the devil has puffed up the heart of man, that he thinks himself equal to every thing. Besides which, what a proof of pride it is, that men should reject the doctrine of Christ, crucified for our sins. But it is too true, that, instead of rejoicing with thankfulness that there is a way of escape open, there are

many who cannot bear the idea of needing an atonement; they do not like to be entirely indebted for every thing to the work of another. All this is so humiliating to man in his naturally corrupt state, that he wishes not to believe it, and therefore looks about to discover some reason for disbelieving it. And, alas! too many are ingenious enough to discover what they fancy is a reason, and they adopt it to their final ruin. Pretending to defend the honour of God the Father, the false teachers in the Apostle's day denied that God the Son had put on human flesh, therein to suffer for our sakes. Nothing, St. John assures us, could be so displeasing to the Almighty. On the contrary, we honour the Son, when we believe the wondrous truths concerning His death and resurrection for our sakes; and at the same time, we honour the Father, who of His infinite love planned this mystery of our redemption. He it was who gave His only begotten Son, that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Well might St. John tremble at the thought of his disciple being led away from the doctrine of Christ, the very foundation upon which the whole of his teaching had been laid. Take away Christ, the chief corner-stone, and the whole must fall. As St. Paul says, "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." It is all and everything in religion to understand the doctrine of Christ; therefore let us carefully examine and see whether our religion stands firm on this rock. It is Christ as an atonement for sin which the natural heart is chiefly inclined to resist. Therefore, let us examine our-

selves on this particular point. Do we feel that our sins deserve hell? Have they ever caused us any anxiety, any distress? We cannot really value the atonement which has been made for sin, if we think lightly of sin. Our chief object, therefore, must be to get a serious impression on our minds, that the wages due to us is eternal death. We may observe here, that merely not to deny the doctrine of Christ is not enough; many do not deny, who yet cannot be said to hold the doctrine of Christ. At least not to any purpose. Head knowledge concerning the facts of our Lord's birth and death, as we repeat them in the creed, is not sufficient to make us true disciples of Christ. For this purpose, we have need to feel our personal interest, in what He has done and suffered. We must not only believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became verily and indeed a man, and suffered death, even the death of the cross, in order to make an atonement for the sins of mankind; but we must further believe that our own sins helped to nail Him to the cross. And we must most gratefully acknowledge, that by Him alone we are saved from the dreadful sufferings of hell. Such a belief as this will of course fill us with joy and thankfulness, and an unbounded love towards Him who is the Author of our deliverance. Now how is it with us? Do we so feel towards Christ? Are we thus deeply interested in the subject, and bound to Him by a debt of love, which we feel must increase throughout all eternity? The text we are considering has in it a very remarkable expression, which demands peculiar attention, "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father

and the Son." *Hath* both the Father and the Son ! Now what does that mean ? Surely it conveys to the mind some vast idea. It must mean something very grand and very glorious, to have the Father and the Son. We cannot suppose that every one who says the creed without disbelieving it, is thus blessed. No ; it is evident that before we can be said to *have* both the Father and the Son, we must be deeply affected, and thoroughly influenced in heart and life, by the doctrines which we hold. Jesus said, " If a man love me, he will keep my words ; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." This seems in some measure to explain what is meant by *having* the Father and the Son ; it is having the love, and favour, and felt presence of the ever blessed Lord God ; which is, in short, to enjoy as much of heaven as can be felt on earth ; and to possess this happiness, we must rightly understand, and duly value, what Christ has done for us. We must be filled with love and gratitude to our merciful Saviour, and make it the end and object of all our exertions to show the reality of our love, by the manner of our lives. So living, we shall be found journeying in the only safe and happy path ; the only road which leads to that bright world where sin and sorrow shall be known no more. Oh, if by God's grace we have ever been brought thus to understand the true doctrine of Christ, let us watch and pray most earnestly, that we may abide in it for ever.

PRAYER.

Oh Lord God, I beseech Thee to enable me

to follow, with humble zeal, the footsteps of St. John, that I may love in sincerity all those who believe the truth, and live according to it. Make me tenderly concerned for their welfare, and careful to promote it. Grant that for my own sake, as well as for the sake of others, I may be found diligently walking according to Thy commandments. Make me very anxious to understand and know the truth; and if I have been taught to know the truth as it is in Jesus, help me to hold it fast unto the end. Preserve me from falling into the snare of those who are deceivers and antichrists. I pray that, even unto my life's end, I may look well to myself, that I lose not those things, which have been wrought in me by the Holy Spirit. Grant that I may so receive the doctrines of Christ, that I may be blessed with a continual sense of Thy most gracious presence, and that so my joy may be full. To Thee, O Heavenly Father, with the Son and Holy Ghost, be glory and honour, for ever and ever. Amen.

THIRD EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN.

EXPLANATION.

VERSE 1 to 4.—This third epistle of St. John, though originally written to one individual, is full of excellent instruction to us all. In the opening address, he calls himself “the elder,” or, the aged Apostle; and he writes to his beloved friend Gaius, whom he says he loves in an especial manner, from their being both of one mind in regard to religious truth; and then, he says, (2) Beloved, I can wish nothing better for you, than that in all your outward concerns you may prosper, as well as you have prospered in the things of your soul. (3) For I found cause for the greatest rejoicing, when our brethren came and told us of the manner, in which religion was manifested in your whole conduct and conversation. (4) For there is really nothing which gives me greater joy, than to hear that those whom I have converted to the truth, continue to walk according to it.

APPLICATION.

That we should not only long, but strive, to be like those who excel in virtue.

It has generally been considered, that of all the Apostles, St. John was the one who most abounded in the grace of love; and what could make him more like God? for "God is love." And shall we not strive to be followers of him? Shall we not endeavour to imitate him in his warm affection and tender zeal for the happiness of others, of which this letter is so beautiful a specimen? Let us now observe what it is which excites in him especial love towards Gaius. It is, that they were of one mind on the subject of religious truth. And this is the strongest cord, the best bond which can unite human hearts.

But, alas! there are not many people in the world like Gaius; not many of whom it could be said, there is nothing to wish, but that they may prosper as well in worldly things, as they do in their spiritual concerns. No; if we look either within us, or around us, we shall probably be obliged to confess, that spiritual religion does not prosper very well in these days. But we must not be satisfied to let the matter rest with merely making this observation. The example of this holy man, Gaius, should animate us to exertion; for we must of course *wish*, that the same thing, which was said of him could be said of us. Reader, do you not feel this? does not the idea that John had nothing to wish for the soul, only for

the body of Gaius, cause you to sigh, when you think how differently things prosper with you? Well, if so, then do not let this sigh be heaved in vain; but let it induce you to make a fresh exertion in pressing on towards perfection. The conduct and character of Gaius are certainly set before us in the Scripture for our imitation, and we shall do well to copy them. It will be for our own great gain, as well as a satisfaction to all who take an interest in our spiritual welfare, if, like Gaius, we so walk as to do credit to our religion. It is not enough that we hold the truth; that is, have right notions on religious subjects; we must also *walk* in the truth; that is, our conduct must show that we really do believe what we profess to believe. For observe: of Gaius it is said, "thou walkest in the truth:" which must mean that his conduct was in accordance with what he professed to believe. There are many who can talk well upon the subject of religion, who act in perfect contradiction to their own words. Now actions speak better than words. It may be well, therefore, for us to consider wherein our conduct differs from what we know and profess to be right. And let us endeavour henceforth so to order our conduct and conversation, as would make the Apostle John, if he were still on earth, greatly to rejoice on our account.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 5 to 10.—St. John had alluded to the fact, that the conduct of Gaius testified to the power of religion in his heart: he now goes on to speak more

particularly of the manner, in which his behaviour had been so satisfactory; he says, (5) Beloved one, the way in which you behave to our brother ministers, though strangers to you, is quite in accordance with the faith you profess. (6) Several have borne witness before the church at Ephesus to the fact of your having behaved most charitably towards them; and certainly if you do assist these men on their journey in such a godly manner, you do well; (7) because it is, for the sake of Christ, that they go forth with the full intention of receiving nothing from the Gentiles; (8) therefore we Christians ought to receive such into our houses, in order that we may be fellow-helpers with them in making known the truth. (9) On the subject of entertaining travelling ministers, I wrote generally to the church to which you belong; but unfortunately Diotrephes, who loves power, and chooses to take the lead, was not willing to receive any directions from me. (10) So if ever I come among you, I shall remember his conduct, for he has most maliciously spoken against me; and not content with this scandal, he neither would receive the brethren himself, nor allow others to do so; but if they did, he turned them out of the congregation, not allowing them to be regarded any longer as members of the church.

APPLICATION.

That our actions, whether good or bad, are all had in remembrance,
to be brought forward at the judgment day.

Happy the man of whom it can be said, "Thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest." To see people living in a manner thoroughly at variance with their Christian calling is so common, that we are not properly affected by it. But when we reflect calmly on the judgment which is to come, we must certainly see, that if we are wise, we shall endeavour to act strictly in conformity with the faith which we profess. And it is a great encouragement to a diligent performance of every duty, to remember that all such actions as are done out of a faithful desire to honour our Lord Christ, will witness for us, not only to the church on earth, but before God in heaven, when the whole assembly of the church of the first-born shall be gathered together; then those who have done faithfully whatsoever they have done, shall in no wise lose their reward. The circumstances of the times have certainly changed since St. John wrote to his beloved Gaius, but true religion, like its author, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; therefore, the same principles which guided them must guide us; and though we may not have an opportunity of proving our faith and love towards Christ, by receiving into our houses the preachers of His gospel, we yet may be fellow-helpers to the truth in various ways. We may by our money do some-

thing towards furnishing the means of sending missionaries to preach in distant lands the everlasting gospel, to both Jews and Gentiles. And our love for those who thus devote themselves to the work of saving souls may be shown also in other ways. The heart that truly loves the cause of Christ, and desires to further it, will always find means, more or less, of doing so. But, alas! there are many who resemble Diotrophes rather than Gaius; they love to have the pre-eminence, and are not willing to receive the Gospel in its humbling and purifying character. And be it observed, that it is possible to have the same proud spirit which he had, without having the power to show it; circumstances alone may prevent us from displaying our evil dispositions. And let us not forget, that our feelings and desires are as well known to God, as were the actions of Diotrophes to St. John; he, in threatening language, says, "If I come, I will remember his deeds." But God does not say, *If* I come. For He will surely come, and remember not our deeds only, nor our words, but even our thoughts. We should, therefore, consider well whether in our mind and feelings we most resemble the good man, whose works of kindness were all done with a faithful regard to the will of Christ; or that proud man, who was continually prating against the Apostle, and cared for nothing but his own consequence. In fact, let us ask whether it is our own honour, or God's service, that we are most concerned about.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 11 to 14.—St. John had been speaking of the proud and haughty conduct of Diotrephes, and, probably, from fearing the influence which this bad man might have upon him, he gives his friend a word of warning. (11) Beloved, he says, take care not to be a follower of any one whose conduct is evil, and not good. Be assured that he only, who bringeth forth the fruits of holiness, is truly a child of God. They who do evil prove plainly that the eyes of their understandings have not been opened to know God. (12) Demetrius, I am happy to say, is reported of well by every one. He is giving most satisfactory proofs of having received the truth into his heart. I, myself, can bear testimony in his favour, and you will feel that my word is to be relied upon. (13) I have a great deal I wish to say to you, but I will not add more now by pen and ink, (14) having a good hope that we shall shortly meet, and then we can talk every thing over together. Peace be with you. All our friends here send kind messages; and I beg to be kindly remembered to all friends with you.

APPLICATION.

That a Christian seeks first the favour of God, but values also the good opinion of men.

In some situations, if a man make profession of religion he is ridiculed for it; but there are others in

which it gains for him respect and honour. This, too often, leads some to play the hypocrite's part, and pretend to that which they have not. But Christians, like fruit-trees, must be judged of by their fruit. And mark : no one can be a true child of God that does not bring forth the fruits of holiness. He that doeth evil hath not seen God. The eyes of his spiritual understanding must be closed, or he would be afraid to commit sin. With our bodily eyes we cannot see God. But if we are enlightened by the Spirit, we shall have such a continual sense of His presence with us, that, like Moses, we may be said to see Him who is invisible. And no one can wilfully sin, while feeling the presence of the Almighty. Reader, do you thus see God, so as to stand in fear of Him? There are many who are only kept from doing evil by the fear of man. They would not care how grievously they sinned, if they could only be quite sure, that no mortal creature would ever know anything about it. Now, is it so with you? or does the remembrance of God's eye, which is ever upon you, make you to stand in fear of sin, though it might be done ever so secretly? These are questions of very great importance, as our happiness to all eternity depends upon our now living in the fear and love of God. Now, if conscience bears us witness, that we are truly seeking the favour of God above every other thing, then, certainly, we may be happy, let our fellow-creatures think what they may of us. But, at the same time, we may very properly wish for the good opinion of those who know us, and be very thankful to God when we obtain it; and this more especially, if our conduct in former days had been

such as to make people think very ill of us. This was the case with Demetrius, of whom St. John here says, that "he hath good report of all men;" at least if this Demetrius be the same man of whom we read in the 19th chapter of Acts. He is there spoken of as a silversmith who made shrines for the heathen goddess Diana; and, fearing to lose what he gained by this false religion, he made no small stir against the preaching of the truth. We also read of Gaius being at that time most roughly handled in the tumult; and, therefore, we may suppose, that before he could believe that Demetrius was entirely changed, he would require to hear it from very good authority. But St. John is sure that he will willingly receive his word as testimony to the truth of it. Moreover, he knows that Gaius will readily believe what he tells him about Demetrius, because it is not the character of a real Christian to harbour resentment, or to be slow in believing a good report of any one. As there is joy among the Angels in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, so there must be joy, also, among all real Christians upon earth, whenever a fellow-creature is turned from the error of his way. But how little are the generality of people inclined to believe that a change for good has taken place. Human nature, which is bad in itself, is sure to be suspicious. But when a man's heart is purified by religion, he is always ready to believe the good news that a sinner is changed, and to forget, as well as to forgive, past injuries. Here, then, is another subject for our self-examination. Let us ask ourselves whether we are habitually suspicious, and slow to believe a good report of those of whom we have heretofore known

much evil. If so, let us consider it a bad sign, and pray much for a purer heart: a heart full of that love which hopeth all things, believeth all things. The close of this, like most of the other apostolic letters, shows what a loving spirit reigned among all Christians in those days. It ends with mutual expressions of love and kindness between those who, whether personally acquainted or not, were friends by the sacred tie of Christian brotherhood; and also with this most delightful benediction on Gaius himself, "Peace be with you." Oh how much is expressed in that one word, "Peace!" Peace is a blessing more to be desired than any other good upon earth, because it is the most enduring. It is that which we can enjoy when all else is gone. Even in the midst of the greatest affliction we may still have peace, if we are conscious that the favour of God, through Christ, rests upon us. And it removes all occasion of fear; for what is there which a soul at peace with God has to dread? Our last worst enemy is death. He is the king of terrors; and his sting is drawn out. In fact, from being an enemy, death becomes a friend. Nature may shrink from the hour of separation, but faith tells us that it is death, and that only, which can crown with everlasting joy the soul that is at peace with God.

PRAYER.

O merciful Father, who hast been graciously pleased to make known to me the blessed truths of the Gospel, grant that I may really receive them into my heart, and walk according to them; grant

that I may be permitted to prosper both in soul and body. Lord, help me faithfully to perform the duties of my station. Make me to watch for opportunities to benefit my fellow-creatures to the uttermost of my power, and to further the cause of Christ. Impress my mind with serious thoughts of the judgment to come, when Thou wilt surely remember our deeds, and deal with us accordingly. Suffer me not to follow after that which is evil, but after that which is good. Make me watchful, above all things, to have a conscience void of offence towards Thee, but also careful so to behave that I may, if possible, have a good report of all men. May love increase and abound among us; and may Thy peace, which is precious above all understanding, rule and reign in my heart, now and for ever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE EPISTLE OF ST. JUDE.

EXPLANATION.

VERSE 1 to 4.—At the opening of this epistle we are informed by whom it was written, and to whom it was addressed ; it begins thus, (1) Jude, otherwise Judas, one of the twelve Apostles, a servant of Jesus Christ, and the brother of St. James, writes to all those who, being sanctified by God, are kept steadfast in the truths of Christ's holy religion, to which they have been called. (2) To them may mercy, peace, and love increasingly abound. After this sort of preface, he thus continues, (3) Beloved friends, having undertaken to write to you on the subject of our common hopes of salvation, I feel that it is especially needful for me earnestly to exhort you to be steady in your defence of the truth, as it was first delivered by Jesus Christ to us His Apostles, and by us to His believing people. (4) For, alas! many false teachers have lately crept into the church ; but that there would be such we knew before hand, by means of prophecy. They are wicked men, who misrepresent the mercy of God offered to us in the Gospel, so as to make it appear an encouragement to sin; and they deny their belief in God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION.

That we should inquire whether we are the sort of persons St. Jude addresses.

When St. Jude describes himself, which he does rather particularly, with a view, perhaps, of distinguishing himself from Judas Iscariot, we may remark, that he says nothing about his being a cousin of our Lord Jesus Christ, and yet it is a fact that he was thus related; and we might have fancied that he would have been proud of such a connexion: but no; he prefers to call himself the servant of Jesus Christ. And here is a source of comfort for us, because this title is open alike to all, and Jesus Christ Himself permits us to feel that in serving Him faithfully we may become as closely related to Him, and more so, than any ties of nature could have made us; for He says, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. Oh! what a privilege is this! Who could desire anything more than to be thus accounted of by Christ? To be His servants, to serve Him faithfully, is to stand to Him as the nearest and dearest relation. And now let us observe how Christians are described in this passage of Scripture. They are spoken of as "sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called." Now, *called* is what we all are in this country, for we all have heard the message of mercy contained in the Gospel, and, therefore, have had a call to re-

pentance and a new life. But are we all sanctified? Are we all preserved in Jesus Christ? Alas! no. But it is to such that St. Jude addresses himself, and to such alone belong mercy, peace, and love. In writing this letter, the object of the Apostle was to urge real Christians to be firm in maintaining the truth; that so, notwithstanding the many enemies at work to ruin them, they might endure steadfast unto the end. And enemies there are at all times, with whom the children of God must contend boldly. But the first question which it becomes every reader of this epistle to ask is this, Have I so listened unto the call of the Gospel, as to be sanctified by the Spirit of God, and preserved unto eternal life through Jesus Christ? Or, am I among the number of the ungodly, who have turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, denying the Lord God and our Saviour Jesus Christ? Perhaps most people would be inclined to say, I am neither one or the other; neither of these descriptions suits me. But we should remember that though we may not yet have arrived at the extreme point on either side, we certainly must rank with one party or the other. There are but two sets of characters in the world, godly and ungodly; and we ought to consider seriously to which we belong. To the one, mercy, peace, and love, will be multiplied; while the other are foreordained unto condemnation. In examining ourselves, we ought to keep in mind that it is possible to shrink with horror at the idea of denying the Lord God in words, and yet to deny Him in works. Again, we may abuse the grace of God without living an openly wicked life; we do so, if we knowingly indulge in anything

that is wrong, and yet hope by the grace of God to be saved. The Gospel of Jesus Christ allows of no such hope. In the covenant of mercy which God has made with man, there is no liberty given for sin; no, not the smallest. Therefore, it is a clear point, that those who can make excuses for their bad tempers, or their unholy conduct, do not understand what the Gospel requires from them; and if they hope to be saved in such a state of mind, they grievously deceive themselves. The grace of God is of infinite extent towards humble penitents, who are earnestly striving against sin; but avails nothing towards those who excuse themselves in what is wrong. And yet how many there are who do this, not the least considering that they are thus, in a certain sense, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. There is nothing more awful than to hear people, who make a profession of religion, defending such conduct as the law of God condemns, and endeavouring to make it appear as if God could, under some circumstances, excuse sin. Those who have received the truth as it was originally, and once for all, delivered to the saints, must stand up boldly in such a case, and maintain that, according to the Gospel, the mercy of God extends only to penitents, and that humiliation and sorrow for any thought, word, or deed, contrary to the perfect law of God, must be united to faith in the blood of sprinkling, or the sinner stands condemned. On these points we must be very decided, because here the honour of God, and the salvation of man, are at stake. Yes, let us be very careful that we both live according to, and “earnestly contend for, the faith which was once

delivered unto the saints," then we may confidently believe mercy, peace, and love, will be multiplied unto us.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 5 to 7.—In order to warn the Christians to whom he wrote against listening to the false teachers, St. Jude says, (5) Let me remind you of the well-known punishment which befell the children of Israel, who, after God had delivered them out of Egypt, perished in the wilderness, because of their unbelief. (6) Again, the Angels are a warning unto us; for those who acted in a manner unworthy of their high condition, and abandoned the station in which they were placed, God condemned to be chained in a place of darkness, until the day of final judgment. (7) In like manner the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose inhabitants gave themselves up to the sin of fornication and other fleshly lusts, stand as a monument of the wrath of God, who condemned such sinners to everlasting fire.

APPLICATION.

The certainty with which God will punish sin.

The language of the Gospel is generally that of persuasion. It sets before us an open door of mercy, and invites us to enter in and be saved. But the Bible contains also the language of threatening, as

we find in the passage before us. "God is love," and this we may plainly see in the covenant of mercy, which He proposes to sinful man. Still, we must never forget that He is also a holy God, and will not suffer sinners to go on in sin with impunity. We may not trifle with such a Being; and the instances which St. Jude here alludes to, of His vengeance falling upon the wicked should teach us that, sooner or later, an awful judgment will come upon all those who lead an unholy life: nay more, on all those who do not lead a really religious and godly life. If, then, mercy will not draw us, let threatenings drive us to repentance. If we have no sense of gratitude, still let self-interest prevail with us to abandon every course of conduct, which must eventually lead to ruin. There are here given us three cases of different sorts of sins, all of which proved fatal. The first was the sin of unbelief; and this shows that we may be lost, even though we lead what the world calls very good sort of lives. The moral upright character will perish, as well as the openly wicked, if wanting in that faith which alone can save the soul. Let us then consider whether we are in danger from this cause. Can we say with St. Paul, "The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me"? Are we looking upon heaven as our glorious inheritance, purchased for us by Christ's most precious blood? And are we diligently preparing ourselves for it: endeavouring, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to live according to the will of God, made known to us in His sacred Word? Have we thus a comfortable assurance, that we are not among those who will perish because of un-

belief? The second instance given of fatal sin is that of discontent and rebellion against God. The Angels in heaven, being dissatisfied with their portion, high and happy as it must have been, rebelled. They left the habitation God had appointed them, hoping, no doubt, for something better. But what was the consequence? They were delivered over to endless misery. Imagination may picture, if it can, the horror and dismay of these fallen Angels, who, instead of bettering their condition, found themselves chained in a place of darkness, there to wait many thousand years, in fearful anticipation of greater suffering to come after the judgment day. Let us fancy we hear the clanking of those chains, which dooms them to despair, and be thankful that *we* are still in the land of the living: still in that state of trial in which we may turn and repent, if we are in danger of having our portion with them. From the history of the Angels we learn what a fearful thing it is to be dissatisfied with God's dealings! How much we have to dread, if at any time we are tempted to repine at our lot, and to wish to leave our habitation, that is, to wish to change the circumstances, in which God's wisdom has placed us. Lastly, we have an instance of that wrath of God, which will fall upon all, who, yielding to the desires of the flesh, commit fornication and other deadly sins. That this is a deadly sin one would suppose many people did not know, so little is it feared, so lightly is it thought of. And yet we are taught to say in our Church service, "from fornication and all other deadly sin, good Lord deliver us!" When we think of the fire and brimstone that came down from heaven, and destroyed Sodom and Gomor-

rah, we may well ask God to deliver us from the **power** of those fleshly lusts that war against the soul, **and** have proved the ruin of thousands both in this **world**, and the next. Let us remember that our bodies **are** the temples, in which God's Spirit delights to **dwell**. But we must keep them holy, if we hope to **be** thus highly blessed. We cannot hope to be **counted** among the disciples of Christ, and the heirs of **eternal** life, unless we are faithfully serving Him **with** our bodies and spirits, which are His.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 8 to 10.—St. Jude was speaking of the sinful conduct of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and goes on to say, (8) In like manner, your false teachers, who are no better than filthy dreamers, indulge their fleshly appetites, despise all lawful authority, and show disrespect to those in power. (9) Yet even Michael, the Archangel, when contending with the devil for the body of Moses, used no bitter language; he only said, The Lord rebuke thee. (10) But these men speak with contempt of things they know nothing about; and in such things as nature teaches them, and which they have in common with the brute beasts, in them they run to excess. (11) Woe be unto them; for they have followed the example of wicked Cain, and have fallen into the error of Balaam, through their love of gain; and will perish, as did Corah, Dathan, and Abiram. (12) These are a disgrace to you, when they come to your religious feasts, not fearing to join themselves to

your holy company, though living careless and ungodly lives. They are as disappointing as clouds without water, which seem to promise refreshing showers, but the wind comes and blows them away. They are like trees, which, having borne fruit that has withered before it was ripe, may be said to be twice dead, and must therefore be plucked up and burned, being good for nothing. (13) Again, as the waves of a raging sea cast up nothing but foam and filth, so are they tossed about by furious passions, and cast up the filth of their shameful conversation; and, as falling stars, they appear bright for a moment, and then sink into the blackness of darkness for ever. (14) Enoch, the seventh descendant from Adam, foretold the fate of such as these, when he said, Behold, the Lord will come, surrounded with an innumerable company of saints, (15) to take vengeance upon the ungodly, and to convince them of their sin, in regard to all their wicked deeds and ungodly language. (16) These men are murmurers and fretful complainers, the slaves of their own selfish lusts. They are proud and contemptuous in their language towards some, while they flatter others, when they expect thereby to gain any advantage. (17) But you, my beloved brethren, be not dismayed, for you must remember, that the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ told you before, that (18) there would be such men who would scoff at religion, who would indulge themselves in all their sinful lusts; and (19) their words are fulfilled in these men, who have caused divisions in the church, and given a licence to sin, thereby proving themselves to be altogether without the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

APPLICATION.

That religion requires all our energies.

St. Jude calls the false teachers filthy dreamers ; and really one would think that men must be dreaming, when they imagine that unholiness and religion can go together. One cannot fancy that any one with his senses wide awake could read the Bible, and suppose that it sanctions sin. The fact is, that many men fancy themselves wide awake, when Satan has lulled them into a fatal sleep ; they dream that they are going to heaven, and so they may continue comfortable enough, until they shall be aroused by the sound of the Archangel and the trump of God, calling them to judgment ; and then, with surprise and horror, they will lift up their eyes in hell, being in torment. Oh, it is indeed a fearful thing to go to sleep, as many do, over the concerns of their souls. When Satan thus finds people off their guard, he well knows how to make good use of his opportunity ; without allowing them to perceive it, he gradually makes them grow worse and worse, till, from being only careless, they become quite wicked, and yet fancy that all is well. In truth, it is no easy matter to get to heaven. To put off the old man, and put on the new, requires all our energies, and no one who is half asleep, will ever make the exertion necessary. Our old nature, which is corrupt, if not vigorously resisted, will not be subdued. We naturally like ease and self-indulgence, and if we are not stirred up to fight manfully

against the world, and the flesh, the devil will be sure to whisper that all such restraints are unnecessary. He it is who makes people dream that with safety they may defile the flesh, and despise dominion. And thus we sometimes find men corrupting themselves like brute beasts, and yet fully expecting that God, for Christ's sake, will receive them into heaven, that blessed and holy place, where there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth !

Such persons are even spots to disgrace an assembly of God's worshippers on earth ; how then shall they be fit to join the company of holy Angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and God the Judge of all ? Since, then, men do so wonderfully deceive themselves, let us be the more particularly strict in our self-examination. Suppose at this moment we were to hear a voice saying, Behold the Lord cometh, with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment, and to convince all who are ungodly of their ungodly deeds, and hard speeches ; what would our feelings be ? Should we tremble, or should we rejoice ? Some there are who, when they read in the last chapter of the Revelation, " Surely I come quickly," can say, from the bottom of their hearts, " Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus." And such are safe and happy. It is indeed a joyful thing to be able to feel sure that the Lord Jesus, when He comes, will not have to convince us of our sins, because we are convinced of them already ; and that He will not take vengeance upon us, because we have humbly applied to Him, with brokenness of heart, for that pardon and peace, which He is ready to bestow. Reader, is this your case ? Have you

learned not to fear the anger of God, because you have learned to fear the power of sin? If we now walk after our lusts, or can find any excuse for our pride and our passion, clearly we have not the Spirit of God. For when the Spirit comes, He convinces of sin. The difference between those who will be saved, and those who will be lost, is just this: the former are in this life so convinced of sin, as to repent; the latter are not convinced, until that day when the Lord, with ten thousand of His saints, cometh to take vengeance.

EXPLANATION.

Verse 20 to 25.—St. Jude now exhorts his brethren not only to beware of falling into errors, but to go on advancing in true godliness; he says, (20) My beloved friends, you who have the foundation of true faith, see that you build thereon a life of holiness; be much in prayer, looking to the Holy Spirit to direct you how to pray. (21) Watch carefully that love to God may rule and reign in your hearts, and be continually rejoicing in the belief, that through the mercy of Christ you will obtain eternal life. (22) And as regards those who have gone astray, you must treat them according to circumstances, being tender and compassionate towards some; (23) while you endeavour to save others by arousing their fears, and snatch them, if possible, from the devouring flame; but take care that you yourselves are not corrupted by them; see that you hate every thing which has the slightest approach to sin. (24) And now I will conclude, with offering

praise to Him who, amidst all your dangers, is able to keep you from falling, and who can make you stand in the glorious presence of Almighty God, not only without condemnation, but with exceeding joy. (25) To Him, the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.

APPLICATION.

What we must do in order to stand undismayed in the presence of God.

These closing sentences are full of instruction and comfort, and we cannot do better than dwell upon them, for here we see the work we have to do, and its blessed end. The work is difficult, but oh what an end, to be presented faultless before the presence of glory, with exceeding joy! It will be exceeding joy indeed, when our trials, and troubles, and sorrows are over, and we are counted faultless for Christ's sake. But for the present we have to work, to watch, and to wait. It must be the great business of our lives, to build up ourselves in our most holy faith; that is to say, we must be constantly endeavouring to make religion bear more and more upon our daily and hourly conduct. We must endeavour to regulate all our thoughts and feelings, as well as our actions, according to the rules of our most holy religion, as we find them in the Bible; but this is no easy matter, and cannot be done in our own strength; therefore, we must be very frequent, and very earnest in prayer, "praying in the Holy Ghost;"

that is, looking for, and trusting in, the help of the Spirit, without whom we cannot keep ourselves in the love of God. Reader, are you thus trying to build yourself up in your most holy faith, and to keep yourself in the love of God? is this the first desire of your heart, and the main object of your life? If it is, no doubt you have again and again felt inclined to despair. The corruption of your own heart, the evil there is in the world, and the power of the devil, are all so bitterly set against you, that, doubtless, you sometimes feel the work almost impossible. But now, when most cast down, think how St. Jude encourages you, by bidding you remember that there is One able to keep you from falling, even the only wise God our Saviour. Oh! let us never forget, that be our difficulties what they may, yet if we are disciples of Christ, more are they that are with us than they that are against us. And the end cometh. It will not be long that we shall have to battle with an evil heart, in a wicked world. We know that nothing continues long here below without change. Death comes to all sooner or later; and it will be a happy event, indeed, to those who are now weary of the contest with sin, and who have found in the only wise God our Saviour an all-sufficient Friend to present them before the presence of glory with exceeding joy. If we wished to approach even an earthly sovereign, we should feel the necessity of finding some friend capable of presenting us in a proper manner. How much more, then, must we need to be presented before God, by One who could answer for our being well received. Reader, consider whether you have now such a Friend. Does Christ own you, do you

think, for a true and faithful disciple? If so, all is well. Nothing will be wanting to make you fit to appear before God, for you will stand complete in Him. He will clothe you in the robes of His own righteousness, and cover you with the garments of His salvation; and thus present you as free from condemnation, as though you had never committed one sin. Doubt not but that He will present you faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy.

PRAYER.

O Lord God, who hast mercifully called me by Thy Holy Spirit to repentance and faith in Christ, grant that I may never resist Thy gracious dealings with me; but that, through Thy goodness and mercy, I may be sanctified and made ready for Thy heavenly kingdom, and preserved from all the evil that is within and around me, by living a life of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Grant that unto me mercy, peace, and love may be multiplied. Assist me, O Lord, rightly to understand the way of salvation, as it is made known to me in Thy written Word; and teach me earnestly to contend for it in a proper spirit against those who oppose themselves to the true faith. Preserve me, I beseech thee, from the evil influence of ungodly men, who turn Thy grace, O God, into lasciviousness, denying Thee, O Lord God, as our Saviour Jesus Christ. Lord, grant that I may have in continual remembrance the lesson taught us by the Jewish people, who perished through unbelief. O Lord, strengthen my faith; impress my mind with a solemn dread of the consequences of sin. May the

fall of the Angels from their first estate teach me to **fear** the spirit of discontent, and to watch against all **murmurings** and **complainings**. And may the awful **fate** of Sodom and Gomorrah make me careful to **avoid** all carnal indulgences. Grant that I may in **this** present life learn so to know the evil of my own **heart**, that I need not to be convinced of it, in that **day**, when Thou, O Lord, shalt come with ten thousand saints to take vengeance on ungodly sinners. Lord, help me now to build myself up in our most **holy** faith. Lord, grant me the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Make me evermore to rejoice in Thy love, and in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom I humbly hope to be presented faultless before the presence of Thy glory, with exceeding joy; to whom with Thee, and the Holy Ghost, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. **Amen.**

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